BALZAC

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RENÉ BENJAMIN: BALZAC

Balzac the Entomologist. From a caricature by Gustave Doré, engraved by Ryckebus

BALZAC

LA PRODIGIEUSE VIE D'HONORÉ DE BALZAC

BY

RENÉ BENJAMIN

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TRANSLATED
BY
JAMES FR. SCANLAN

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La Prodigieuse Vie d'Honoré de Balzac
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TO
MARCEL BOUTERON

My dear friend, I cannot conceive a life of Balzac and you not godfather to it. Your name in the front of this book is a warrant to the intelligence and a joy to the heart. Of this great man you know everything, you possess everything, you give everything. Could I then have spoken of him without desiring your approval and without telling you of my gratitude?

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Lawton, Grant Richards, 1910.

Henry Holt and Co., and Dr. Juanita H. Floyd for the portrait of Madame d'Abrantès from "Women in the Life of Balzac" by Juanita H. Floyd, Holt, 1921.

The Frederick A. Stokes Company for Balzac at 25; Laure de Balzac; and the caricature by Benjamin; all from "Honoré de Balzac" by Albert Keim and Louis Lumet, Stokes, 1914.

Dodd, Mead and Co. for Mme de Berny and The House in the rue des Marais, both from "Honoré de Balzac" by Mary F. Sanders, Dodd, Mead, 1924.

Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan for the miniature of Madame Hanska.

1. *Balzac's Father and Mother from "Balzac et son oeuvre" by André Bellessart, Paris, Perrin et Cie., 1924.*
2. *House of Père Goriot from the "Bookman," 1909.*
3. *Galley-proof from "Balzac" by Ernst Robert Curtins, Bonn, Friedrich Cohen, 1923.*
4. *Medallions by David from "L'Iconographie de Balzac" by Henri Bouchot, in "La Contemporaine," Paris, Aug. 25, 1901.*
5. *Drawing by Gavarni from same.*

I

To Dr. Blanchard
in appreciation
From Norman J. Whitney

THE STRUGGLE WITH LIFE

I

There is food for sorrow and for speculation on the dullard wits alike of societies and families in the thought that in almost every instance the very earliest hours of men marked out for greatness are spent unnoted. No one is alert to welcome genius, which, like love, has to fight for its throne. Parents and contemporaries pass their lives unmoved in the dawning splendour, and none realizes it save such minds as, in after days, think wistfully on a lost beauty.

It is true that to divine the great man in the child demands a poetic power; more than that, humanity is unversed in such divination. — Among the press of everyday objects how should their sated eyes discern the insignia of godhead? Are they quicker to see them in the radiant sky of a summer day? Hearts sensitive to greatness are as rare as those which, under the ever-renewed bounty of the sun, expect the thrill of yet unopened roses.

And that is why in June 1813, at Tours, on the banks of the Loire, where his mother was taking him and his sister for a walk, Honoré Balzac, being then fourteen years old, suddenly shouted, skipping like a young colt: "Laure, do you know that your brother is going to be a famous man?"

All innocent, the child burst into laughter, while the too sophisticated mother shrugged her shoulders and retorted: "Don't use words of which you don't understand the meaning."

The day was calm and pleasant, and there was nothing that did not belong to common days in the limpid light of the heavens and the tranquillity of the Touraine

landscape, nothing to warn a mind untroubled by any dim foreknowledge that this light-hearted cry of youth heralded one of the great glories of France. The boy had reached the age when the voice is just breaking absurdly. How should he be taken seriously? Yet this is the solemn moment when the individual soul is born, the moment of puberty, the first entry into life; long-dead men and women are striving in him: they are all speaking in one accord; and in the confused sound of their voices, under that childish hat, adorned by a tiny bird of paradise, this is a miniature man affronting the world and trying to find a foothold.

Dreaming, so young as he is, great dreams, he has been tramping through the dust, and the maternal voice took on a sharp note to say: "There you've gone and dirtied your socks and shoes! The trouble you give me —— And you do nothing but laugh. You don't care at all!"

Clear-eyed, rosy-cheeked, with smiling lips, the child replied: "Don't be angry, darling mother!"

He ran along, snuffing up the wind, and counting the white sails on the Loire, spreading themselves to the light breezes, as he to the promises held out by life. With brown, eager eyes, in which the fiery spirit was already gleaming, he looked lovingly over the pleasant country-side, gentle slopes, with smiling gardens, where the houses were as gracious and as naturally demure as children. One of them was called *La Grenadière.*

"Which is that, Laure, do you know?"

"Don't know. And why *Grenadière?* Do soldiers live there? Do you know, Honoré?"

"Don't know. We can't ask mamma: she would get angry again. Laure, when you're a mother, shall you get angry?"

"Silly! — Your kite is dragging."

When they had been walking over an hour, Mme Balzac turned about. "Now, then. Don't you see that I'm going back?"

She had a dry, imperious manner, that fashionable young woman, as if a certain uneasiness lurked under her air of untroubled security. — Honoré did not understand it. Ah, well; it couldn't be helped. The splendid church of Saint-Gatien rose above the roofs, renaissance spires on Gothic towers, gracious strength and charity all smiles. "Good day to your ladyship," said Honoré. The bridge. "Look how splendidly they have repaired it. The ice won't carry it away again. It will live longer than any of us, won't it, mamma?" The town hall, with its pediment, where the Loire and the Cher meet. "Madam — sir!" Honoré greeted them, "how pleased I am to see you come out of the water. Your fishes getting on all right? . . . I . . . oh, quite well, thanks!"

His foot stumbled at this point. Ah, those cobblestones in the rue de l'Armée d'Italie! — Laure laughed for joy; his mother heaved a sigh. They passed a picture dealer's shop and there was a picture of Napoleon for sale, standing on the map of Corsica.

"Mamma," says Honoré, still playing the clown, "I wish I had been born in Corsica."

"Preposterous child," was Mme Balzac's reply.

He burst out laughing.

There was a rush of people. A man was crying the news from the army. The children had run too.

"Mamma! mamma! A victory!"

"Once more," the man proclaimed — and running with sweat his face glistened under a faded hat, adorned with a cockade and three laurel leaves — "once more, glory crowns the Emperor and France!" (The crowd

murmured: "Ah!" with looks and smiles.) "The Grand Army, citizens, has been victorious at Bauzin! — or Bautzin! — or Bautzen! — I can't pronounce these cursed names that don't even sound human!" ("Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted the crowd.) "— And the Allies, in complete disorder, have fled as far as the Oder!" (Oh, long live France! Long live the Emperor!)

Honoré, his heart beating madly, copied all the soldier's gestures — for he was a soldier and had lost a leg — and so acquired his first perception of man's nobility from the spectacle of that poor wretch exulting in the rumour of a victory.

How joyously he returned home, his head full of wild dreams! Life was so crowded with splendid, lovely things! Mme Balzac had given an order. The governess who supervised the children's education ran up. Now they had to change, and take off their smart outdoor things. Truth to tell, Honoré took off his jacket and his fine knickers without even giving them a thought; he was dreaming himself in Prussia; he was carrying a flag of victory; he was entering a conquered city; he was hearing the drums beating and the plaudits of the crowd.

When at last he was clothed in his comfortable indoor things, he called out to Laure and, since there was an hour to go before meal-time, said: "Come along up to the lumber-room."

It was a wonderful room under the roof. In the first place, from the window they could see Tours and all its chimneys, which in the glory of the evening light seemed symbols of comfortable ease and quiet security.

"Do you know, little sister," said Honoré, "that we are very lucky to have been born in a fine city! — We might have been savages; there still are some! The

only unfortunate part about it is that Tours is nowhere near Prussia. The Emperor won't come to Tours. I would give anything to see him. Did Mademoiselle tell you how during the retreat from Russia the soldiers were dying in the snow; it was thirty degrees below zero? And that man kept on, giving orders, feeling nothing at all; he was not even cold! Papa said so: he's not a man like other men."

Laure was perched up on an old trunk and, with knees drawn up to her chin, was listening intently, with her pleasant, round little face and her big golden eyes.

"What makes me glad," Honoré continued with ingenuous simplicity, "is that I too don't feel that I'm just like everyone else. — You sometimes ask me what it was like at school at Vendôme. Dear me — it might have been all right, Laure darling, for boys — just like other boys. But it bored me to death, I can tell you, for us all to be doing the same lesson at the same time, in the same room, in exercise books all the same size. That we should all have the same ideas and all be dirty alike, that was the idea the good fathers thought proper for us — and they were not always so good either."

Laure started back, as if Honoré had said something blasphemous; then in a low voice she said: "Are you talking about the fathers who used to cane your hands?"

"Oh," said Honoré indifferently, "the cane! — While they were hitting me, I used to think about something else; and there you are! — And besides, I had chilblains: they used to change their minds at the last minute. — But I shall never forget Father Haugoult, who took away my essay."

"What essay?"

"I've told you about it."

"Don't remember."

"In the first place, my dear Laure, you should say: 'I do not remember it.'"

"That takes too long."

"Everything worth while takes a long time. To know French properly takes longer than not knowing it. To will a thing takes a long time. To be absolutely madly determined on anything takes a long time. And that is what I wrote about in my essay: *Essay on the Will.*"

"Did you do it instead of doing your lessons?"

"Of course I did. And it was in my desk, and I used to open my desk to peep at it. Oh, I did love it. It was good, I can tell you. My heart jumped for joy when I was writing it; I was just the same age as Blaise Pascal, my little Laure, when he discovered unaided all mathematics. The day when Father Haugoult took it away from me, I thought of you, of mamma and of papa; I said to myself: "I shall never see them again." I wanted to die. — Then, when I was ill, mamma came for me; I said good-bye to all the fathers; I didn't want to say it to him. When we are all in heaven, if he is in hell, I will tell God to pardon him; not before. Laure, he burnt the thing I loved more than anything else in the world."

"After me."

"Yes, after you. For I love you most of all. Why, I'd like to live with you always, because you're the only sort of woman I love. And since one can't marry one's sister, you shall be my sweetheart, the woman for whom I shall do everything!"

"What is it you're going to do?"

"I can't tell you yet. But when the people are fêting me, you shall be in the very front, darling Laure, close to the dais on which I stand."

A flush of joy rose to his cheeks as he described it.

Balzac's birthplace at Tours

"Can you understand," he went on, "why papa, who is so clever, never has his name in papers and books?"

Laure looked at him archly. "He does not like people to talk about him."

"That's true," said Honoré. (He pointed behind the trunk to piles of pamphlets, grey with dust.) "He writes splendidly and look what happens to it all!"

"Have you read any of them?" asked Laure.

"The doctor has forbidden me to read."

"In that case," said Laure, "you won't become a man of learning."

"Oh! but I will, Laure!"

He put his head down on an old joist and turned a somersault.

"Yes indeed, babs! And I shall not be like M. de la Hervelette, who is just an old ass — don't breathe a word, but papa said so — nor like M. Castrillon, with his everlasting snivel — 'H'nm! H'nm! how do you do, ma'am? Children well? H'nm! So this is Honoré, h'nm, just left school, h'nm!'"

Laure shouted with laughter.

"'Good-night, madame, h'nm! h'nm!' And I refuse too to be anything like M. Barillot, postmaster to his Imperial Majesty. Laure, you do behave badly — Chevalier of the Legion of Honour! — Laure, I'm positively afraid for you! You will bring shame on your family and kill your grandmother with grief. — And I won't even be like M. de Margonne — oh, but he's a little darling, he is, and how prettily he makes eyes at mamma, from the moment he gets out of his little carriage at the corner of the bridge, where he stands watching the Loire flow by as the people walk to and fro, and all the time he has, they say, estates at Saché, where nothing grows but weeds. — There you are, my dear, sweet little love,

that's what I tell you! There you are, my little crackajack! So much for that! Now let me give you a kiss. Give me your tiny nose. Your nose is cold, which is a sign that you're quite well. Go on as well as you are doing, and take care of the chill of the evening, as dear mamma would say."

"Dinner's ready, children." Mademoiselle's voice.

Honoré answered: "Form fours! March! Left, right! left! left! —"

At the foot of the staircase Mme Balzac was waiting, motionless. She made no comment. She looked at Honoré with her freezing blue eyes. And he fell quiet, suddenly choked into silence. They made their way soberly to the dining-room.

It was an agreeable Louis Quinze room, furnished with tall oak sideboards, the mouldings of which indicated the hand of a craftsman who loved his art, women, delicacy, and cleanliness. They shone like the polished floor. The table had slender legs, the chairs were pleasing. It was a room in which both the fare and the talk ought to have been charming.

"Why is that child's hair always arranged like a red Indian's?"

The question, directed towards his daughter, came in a placid voice from the father. Laure blushed. Honoré ventured a low-toned: "I think Laure looks very jolly with her feather on top."

"Be quiet," ordered Mme Balzac.

"No one asked for your opinion," added his grandmother, Mme Sallambier, who was in charge of the two younger children, Laurence and Henry.

She accompanied her rebuke with a glance of displeasure, so as to gratify her daughter. Then she tied Honoré's table napkin, and with a swift gesture kissed

the little boy on the neck. He turned round with a cheerful smile. She said: "Hush." They all sat down. Mme Balzac's hair was arranged with meticulous care. Round her neck she had knotted a narrow ribbon of yellow silk, to match her sash. She had beautiful hands and she swallowed her soup with a nervous air, her thin nose in her plate. M. Balzac sat leaning back slightly in his chair. He smiled, as if lost in dreams; he ate with deliberation. And a moment later he devoured his food with light-hearted haste. In his soft hair, on his narrow lips, in the swift glance of his eyes, is apparent the quick, capricious fancy of a race whose minds never cease to play with ideas. He glanced frequently towards the window, but never towards his mother-in-law. He was wearing a quilted coat of puce silk and a high, white cravat, which his long, drooping whiskers swept as often as he let his head fall forward between his shoulders with a pleased air of summoning up all his strength. An amazing old man of sixty-seven, who would have been taken for fifty, beside his young wife, in the bloom of her thirty years. Vigour inherited from a southern father, a peasant of Albi, as sturdy as an oak. M. Balzac retained his muscles, the lilt of his intonation, the sun of his imagination. And when he was apparently seated at dinner surrounded by his family, he had in reality fled to the realm of abstract speculation, where he was rebuilding the world on a new basis.

"Honoré, I won't have you rolling all over the table like a donkey in the meadow! . . . If I have to reprove you once again, I shall send you off to bed with a piece of dry bread!"

Thus his mother scolded on, incapable of creating a happy atmosphere round her, and blind to the fact that the boy's open face expressed a healthy and generous

disposition. The father was no more apt to discuss it, for he saw with his imagination and not with his eyes. It happens so only too often in families, more's the pity! They were two creatures as sundered as the poles, the one southern, the other northern, the one with his head in the clouds, the other bowed to the earth, and they had not the faintest notion that between them they had produced a delightful youngster, whose feet were firmly planted on the ground while his head was raised to the sky. He was their child, their spirit and their flesh, and yet they seemed three isolated beings, three utter strangers. The mother had come out of her room, where she had been reading Swedenborg; the father, out of his study, where he had been poring over human longevity as exemplified in the Bible. The grandmother, a worthy woman, but of the common sort, had just spent an hour in the kitchen nagging a wretched little girl who couldn't help herself. And so there was no conversation at the table. Did the children tell their father that news of a victory was being cried in the streets, Mme Balzac would sigh that that news meant thousands of soldiers killed. Thereupon M. Balzac, who managed the hospital in Tours, purposely retorted that among all those dead — there were, all the same (he knew something about it), a certain number of wounded, and who would recover too! — Moreover all those killed meant shoes for those who hadn't any and a step up for those that were anxious for it! On which the grandmother grew wroth and told her son-in-law that he was talking like those canting priests. Every man killed, to be sure, meant so many saints in heaven! He still continued to look away from her. He smiled and drummed upon the table, and began to explain to Honoré, with an air of detachment, that Napoleon was a great man, well worthy a Plutarch,

and that so far back as 1809 he had suggested for him the title of "benefactor of mankind." Mme Balzac thereupon turned to Henry, to whom she confided, between a sigh and a sigh, that in April the Emperor levied on the country a further tribute of a hundred and eighty thousand soldiers! This evoked a discussion on the death of Duroc. Napoleon had shaken hands with him and said: "There is a life after this! We shall meet again!" Since it was Mme Balzac who related the incident, M. Balzac, who nevertheless admired the Emperor, immediately observed that it might be a prospect to which perhaps Duroc did not look forward. "And after all," the grandmother put in, annoyed, "is there another life?" — From Duroc the talk passed on to Delille, who also had just died. Honoré knew that his body had been laid in state at the Collège de France and that his head had been crowned with a laurel wreath. He asked for further details. No one afforded any. M. Balzac refused to eat the joint. He explained authoritatively that the consumption of meat in the evening prevents sleep, by poisoning the tissues.

"The first we've heard of it!" grumbled Mme Balzac. "You were of exactly the opposite opinion two months ago. Good heavens, what a fanciful turn of mind you have!"

"I was brought up on turned milk, you see" was M. Balzac's reply.

Vegetables. Dessert. They heard the barking of a dog. Laurence observed: "That's the big dog who is always jumping up at me."

"I have warned you a hundred times," M. Balzac declared. "Never let a dog come near you. Dogs are dangerous beasts, that ought to be taxed. It is the only way to get the number down."

"And, by the way, how many copies were sold of that *History of Rabies,* written by your husband three years ago?" the grandmother asked Mme Balzac in a significant manner.

"A million and a half," exclaimed M. Balzac. And he rose to his feet laughing.

Which led Honoré to imagine that he might laugh too.

"Impudence!" cried the grandmother. "Be off to bed with you!"

Honoré tried to catch his father's eye; he encountered only his back. The quilted puce coat was in the act of disappearing through the door.

"Oh dear, oh dear! can I find somebody who loves me? And whom ought I to love?" Honoré wondered, with a swelling heart; he would have liked so much to unburden himself. Oh, for a father, or a mother! How often had he read, in the books which he used to devour when he was with the Oratorians at Vendôme, that we have no more sacred thing in the world. Then why should he go in fear of her whom he called mother, and why had he never yet dared to relate to his father, who knew everything, who could talk about anything, who was the most thinking man he knew, the dramatic story of the *Essay on the Will?* In a country which possessed so superb a river, so noble a cathedral, such lovely pictures, and such delicious little pork sausages, and was ruled by an Emperor so valiant and so unconquerable, why, in the name of heaven, why was not everyone happy?

"Children," said Mademoiselle, "come and wash your face and hands."

Honoré approached like a beaten dog. But the cool water felt good and cleared the mind. He tickled Laure as they came out of the bath-room. — They heard sing-

ing. "Listen!" said he. They listened attentively. It was M. Balzac, in his study, humming Beranger's latest song:

There was a king of Yvetot once,
But little known in story ——

"Do listen! —"

To bed betimes, and rising late,
Sound sleeper without glory. . . .

"Well, he's not a great king," said Honoré, twirling on his toes. He flung himself into his room. His sister followed him there at a run.

Mme Balzac appeared on the threshold. "Honoré, if this noise continues, you will get your face slapped."

The children undressed in silence. Once they were in bed, and their prayers said, Mademoiselle blew out the candle. She went away. — There was no more singing to be heard. Honoré felt not the least desire for sleep; he yawned and did not know what to do with himself. He would have liked to run, be active, read, write, fight, conquer, love, weep; in short, achieve a host of things great and lovely, after the manner of heroes or saints. And he turned and tossed on his pillow.

"Ho — no — ré! —" A whisper: it was Laure.

"What do you want?"

A sudden burst of laughter, and the child asked aloud: "Do you always long to be a great ——"

The door flew open. Mme Balzac flourished a candle, rushed up to Honoré's bed.

"Who spoke?"

He sat up, his black hair bristling on his head, turned on her the lightning of his wonderful eyes, and answered: "I did!"

Crack! crack! Two slaps; Mme Balzac went out again.

"Oh! — oh — " Laure moaned, biting the sheet to

keep from crying. — "Why did you say that — when —— Did it hurt dreadfully?"

Proudly Honoré answers: "Hardly felt it!"

At that, her heart full to overflowing, overflowing with grief and admiration, the child said in an unreproducible voice, tremulous and very sweet, expressing all the innocence of her eleven years: "I am sure, too — that you are going to be a great man!"

2

A year after this incident M. Balzac was put in charge of the military commissariat in Paris, and the children experienced all the delights of a removal, travelling, and a new house in a strange town. A great city, bearing a name to conjure with! Honoré was filled with pride at the thought that he was going to live there. The day before their departure, surrounded by their boxes and parcels, he enacted for his sister, with that talent for mimicry he already had in so inimitable a degree, a comedy wherein all the good people of Tours filed past him while he bade them mocking farewells.

"Good-bye, crusts and sippets! And you, too, city so deeply encrusted! Continue, as you get more and more crusted, your encrusting life. As for us, who were just beginning to get crusty, we shall make haste to get rid of the crust which is caking our minds. *Thou* crustifiest, *he* crustifies, *you* crustify. But *I* crustify? No, gentlemen! And *we* crustify? Never!"

For all his boasting, however, he was not to become a complete Parisian all at once. The day after their arrival his mother placed him in M. Lepître's private school, rue Saint-Louis. During the first week there he was deaf to everything but his own fancies. His brain was on fire,

and he longed to see Notre-Dame, the Louvre, the Tuileries. Where was it the Emperor lived? Where did they guillotine the king? He was on the threshold of years of high excitement.

The Allies in the capital, the return of Louis XVIII, the Hundred Days, Waterloo, the Restoration, what hours of crowded life lay before this youthful soul, so ardent an inquirer after the meaning of life and the destiny of France! A time of unrest; every man's desire was to recover his balance once again. We have had, Honoré reflected, a mighty conqueror; what we need now is great thinkers, minds who will give the people ideas and laws, and with a gallant impulse he imagined that he might be one of the latter. Honoré, modelling himself on M. Lepître, was a royalist, but like his father was alive to the fact that since the Revolution every man might aspire to fame by devoting himself to his country; he had only to take the trouble to be born — in no matter what station in life!

A year with Lepître, as long in another private school, then two miraculous years, swift to pass as spring, when he was entered at the School of Law, when he kept up a show at being a clerk in the office of M. Guillonnet de Merville, when he scoured Paris, when he learned to dance, when with a passionate eagerness he attended lectures at the Sorbonne — that was the story of his life until his twentieth year. Even so early he was obsessed by one unappeasable anxiety: never, never to lose any time. When he seemed merely to be taking a walk, when he strolled about, when he was day-dreaming or indulging in reverie, he was doing what was essential work: he was observing and understanding; he was organizing his life. If he was inattentive at his law classes, the reason was that his mind had perceived that law was use-

less to his plan, which was to do only what was great. In exploring every nook and cranny of Paris, it was because, impelled thereto by admiration, he was seeking out and greeting the past, which would give him inspiration for the morrow. Did he yawn over his studies? Absent himself without excuse? The reason was that his petty clerking job of copying, entering, and classifying, would kill in him the glorious desire he had of creating! Above all he was anxious not to waste himself. Paris — was the city of spiritual excitements, history in its most famous moments, the present at its most brilliant, with the loveliest women and the best-known men. When with eager eyes he watched the open carriages moving along the Champs Élysées, even then, at once grave and ingenuous, he was already weighing the conditions which go to make society. Confronted by luxury, he would try to discover its sources. Who owned these lovely and desirable women? Who deserved them? He had no ignoble thoughts, and if he saw himself already in a carriage, beside one of them, it was only after a heroic struggle which had brought him fame and the reward of fame, which is love. Women of Paris, how intoxicating you were to the amorous eyes of this thrilled and eager little provincial! He had fine eyes, a deep, warm gold in colour, but you set stars gleaming in them. He admired you reverently; you kindled a poetic flame; and he was dashed only when he returned home, because suddenly his charming sisters, who a few months before symbolized for him all the youth and beauty of the world, seemed awkward and old-fashioned to him. Their feet, their hands, their movements, their appearance, did not hold for Honoré that lyrical liveliness which made the women of Paris, so subtle and unconstrained, so exciting. And he was rough with the little girls when, innocent of

vanity about themselves, they went into raptures over the silk stockings and shining pumps which he put on to go to the Odéon ball: "My word, you children have never seen anything at all!"

A good thing that they did not see him, an hour later, fall — with his partner! He would never have forgiven it them; and yet, would they have indulged in the scornful laughter of those Parisian women who intoxicate him? He felt himself blushing for shame, but a feeling of pride uplifted him.

In the street, shaking his fists at the columns of the theatre, he swore: "I will conquer the world by another way than dancing."

The next day he spent three hours on a quay, his head in the boxes of the second-hand book dealers. He was seized with a sudden hunger for reading. He decided that the world was malicious, but books good. Once he opened an old second-hand book, he was filled with emotion; when he closed it again, he felt himself the richer, especially on the banks of the Seine, in front of the Louvre and Notre-Dame! His heart leaped at being in such company! — When the book happened to be very fat and not dear, he bought it. Another book! There was not a clear space left on the floor of his room. "I simply give up trying to keep your room tidy," said his mother. But he let his hunger for knowledge have full sway over him, and everything was of profound interest to him: history, literature, science. It was of his own accord that he attended the classes of the Sorbonne: hours of ardent life! With his whole heart he admired and envied those men who stood up before a room crowded with attentive women and students and in a voice burning with emotion delivered superb lectures on great men and their great achievements. Villemain!

Cousin! Cousin, scientist and man of letters, expounded the theory that man is the product of his environment, national, social, and climatic. Honoré was fascinated and convinced. Villemain was twenty-eight years old. He had been appointed to the chair of French rhetoric at the age of eloquent enthusiasms. He was proud and happy. He painted in large, generous lines a picture of the eighteenth century. Honoré saw and believed. So that at the end of a lecture, when the applause broke forth, he was as intoxicated by it as if it had been offered to him. He imagined that it was he who was on the platform after delivering the brilliant lecture; and while with the rest he clapped his hands for this supreme magician, it was he himself who, following his dream, found himself breathless, and recovered his breath again with a smile as he bowed to thank the audience.

Emotions all the more poignant that he indulged them in secret: to whom could he have confided them? He was ingenuous, but not to that point. His father would have jeered at him; he was an enthusiast, but with a spice of malice. His mother would have regarded him as a madman. His sisters could not understand. His brother — was tied to his mother's petticoats. There remained only Mlle de Rougemont, an old friend, with whom he could discuss the fame of men of letters. Mlle de Rougemont was a maiden lady of the old order, very old now, for since the Revolution everything was changed, both institutions and manners. This dear soul was a quaint, living anachronism, clad in her gown of *feuille-morte*, with its incredible folds, carrying a parasol after the fashion of Marie-Antoinette at Trianon, and taking a pinch of snuff for her tender nose from a gold snuff-box. She visited Mme Balzac, and Honoré often found her there when he came home.

"Ah," she cried, simpering, "I see in this young man's eyes that he is going to ask me if I remember M. Caron — M. Caron de Beaumarchais! — Slightly — very slightly. — I have heard him repeat in my presence what he told a noble lord: 'You maintain, sir, that I am not an aristocrat? Well, here's my receipt!'"

"So he was as impudent as his *Figaro*, was he?" Honoré asked.

"He was Figaro! He depicted himself. A great writer always draws himself."

"That's a subtle point you've just made," said Honoré.

"I do not know if it is subtle," answered Mlle de Rougemont, blushing with pleasure, "but I know that a writer must be richer than other men; he must contain all other men in himself." And she smoothed out her beautiful gown with her mittened hands.

Honoré nodded his head approvingly. "True — true. —" And to himself: "I shall be rich."

A secret monologue was going on in his head, guessed at by none, but louder and more self-willed than the words he uttered. He worshipped Beaumarchais. What a man that was! Spawn of old Nick. He achieved everything — even masterpieces, with a smile on his lips, scattering words as the firmament its flashes of light. Watch-maker, musician, gun dealer, barrister, dramatist! And Honoré looked affectionately at the old maiden lady; her face was covered with wrinkles and there were pouches under her eyes, but her eyes had seen that amazing man! He regarded them as if he rediscovered therein the famous image. The reason was that over a young man longing to achieve intellectual success the art of the theatre exercises by far the greatest attraction. A comedy at once amusing and satiric has an immense

power over a French audience. There are enchanting actresses to present the author's ideas to spectators induced by the glittering lights and the warmth of the theatre into a state of susceptibility to every emotion, even of the intellect. Honoré convinced himself that there was room, in this restoration period, for a great playwright!

He went as often as he could to the Théâtre Français; it was only there that great plays were performed; he had no time to waste on other theatres. He stood in queues, listening to the conversation of the patrons of the gallery. He began to realize what pleased the unsophisticated and honest man in the street, and he accused himself of being too complex; but he went in; he took his seat, and was filled with the same unaffected emotions as his neighbours. He returned home with tears in his eyes. The applause of the theatre echoed in his ears. When all was said and done, nothing stirred him as did the thought of dramatic fame. The opulence that he saw in the Champs Élysées, the grandeur of the books that fired his brain, the nights when he secretly relit his candle, the most moving and fascinating lectures at the Sorbonne, nothing lent wings to his soul, nothing in Paris filled him with greater exultation than the thought of the reward of the successful dramatist. Sophocles, Shakspere, Molière, the great names! Corneille, the master of masters! In his mind he added Honoré Balzac to these sublime names. He saw himself in their company, on the frieze of the ceiling in the principal theatre in Paris, Paris the capital — that is to say, the leader of thought — Paris, which gave form to his ambitions and made of him a man determined to become the glory of his family.

This last idea filled him with ecstasy. And he waited

in a state of exalted anguish for the moment of release and frank avowal, the happy occasion when with brave, tranquil dignity he could say to his father: "My dear papa, I have determined to make you famous!" The thought even hurt him, so intense was the pleasure which the conviction gave him that he would succeed. — But M. Balzac, at the time, was arranging in his parental heart the mode of life that he had dreamed for himself. A position of freedom where Honoré would earn a sure and ample living, without sinking into intellectual slavery. This eccentric, who esteemed independence above everything else, had regarded with affection the administrative service in which thirty years of his life had been spent, for the unshackled intellectual life which it made possible. Outside his department the Civil Servant has time for thought and creative work. The unfortunate thing is that in the morning he becomes a Civil Servant again — that is to say, a subordinate to mediocre men — "And that is, in short, quite intolerable!" reflected M. Balzac, who had managed to tolerate it for a very long time. Hence his large-minded efforts to find a lawyer's office for his son. He would have liked that above anything; at least a man is his own master. He would have passed on the paper to his clerks. He himself would have read and written; he might even have become a second Montaigne and given his *Essays* to the world: it is a book which can always be done again. — However that might be, he desired for his son the delights which he had not enjoyed, and in imagination he already saw Honoré's happy, grateful face on the day when with benevolent firmness he would say: "My boy, I am going to set you up for life." So each imagined himself to be preparing happiness for the other, and suffered only in his inability to give it

without the delay due to the constraint inevitably present between father and son when both are oversensitive and over-proud.

Suddenly the opportunity presented itself; unexpectedly it thrust itself upon both, the old man and the young, and they looked at each other with a quick, half-repressed emotion. M. Balzac had come upon his son reading Rabelais.

"What a mighty mind! What magnificent freedom! Ah, Honoré, freedom!" The words were enough to create a bond of sympathy between them. "Nothing is more worth having, you know!"

"Do you think so, papa?"

"And talking of freedom, Honoré, I want to speak to you seriously ——"

"Please."

"About — in fact, about your life! You're a man now."

Honoré looked up, and thought: "How pleased the dear old fellow will be when I tell him ——" And his father looked down, saying to himself: "Now for it! — But he'll fall on my neck!"

Thereupon both began talking at once, and neither understood what the other said. Amazing. They had to start all over again. Frightful! Instead of a peace treaty, with laurel wreaths and a dove, it was war, with resolute and unyielding glances; for nothing so much vexes sensitive hearts as incapacity to understand their generosity.

"What? Don't you want me to be famous?"

"My boy, you are rejecting my experience and my affection."

Tragic encounter between two lonely souls charged with storm. Who will be the victor? The young man.

Balzac's Mother

From the first instant the old man realized that, but, wishing to retire in good order, he fell back on a harsh attitude.

Honoré had hurt him by a burst of eloquence: "A solicitor? I don't see! I know that you can be a great soldier, a great poet, or a great statesman. I've nothing to say against these professions. But I haven't heard of any great solicitors. And I won't have anything to do with it! I despise a profession in which one can't become great."

His father was deeply mortified. "So," he retorted, "so our young gentleman wishes to be Voltaire or Rousseau?"

Honoré felt that he was ridiculous, and yet he had given no cause for it. In the circumstances, what reply could he make? His nature was candid and free from resentment. What? Still further hurt his father? Unmoved, he said placidly: "Had they at least fathers as intelligent as you?"

M. Balzac, after this stroke, did not pursue a discussion in which every essential point had been made; and he withdrew to his room, while Honoré, with throbbing temples, went out into the little streets of the Marais, and walked agitatedly about.

If Henry had not listened behind a door, father and son might perhaps have lived side by side for months without reopening the question. But Henry informed his mother. And the pathos of the story was immediately marred by the unstrained exasperation which Mme Balzac visited on her husband and her son. She added the element of melodrama to this scene in which two strong natures clashed and oppressed each other. Such is the unhappy part played by many women, even distinguished women, whose nerves render it impossible

for them to preserve a sense of proportion. So Mme Balzac talked of madness, when she was the sole person to be furnishing an instance of it, and in the wordy eruptions of her wrath no one made out the exact drift of her prophecies. Would she kill herself for shame? Or did she mean that Honoré would kill her with grief? For her pride's sake would she not herself kill Honoré? In any event, she struck terror into none but her daughters and her servants. Her sons and M. Balzac were moved to nothing but a sense of exhaustion. At last, after a worse storm than usual, when she caught her foot in a chair, fell, injured her knee, and wrathfully shut herself up to nurse it, temporary peace descended on the scene. And Honoré, his heart contracted with grief, withdrew into himself and waited miserably in silence.

Mothers are often unreasonable, but their very lack of reason makes them useful and moving. Their hearts know neither peace nor indifference; by their self-troubling they keep conflicts alive; but the truth is that it is they who make it possible to break through gnawing, barren silences.

As it happened, the manner of life of the Balzacs was suddenly altered. If the father was anxious to settle his eldest son in life, it was because he himself was ready to retire. A simple phrase that meant some thousands of francs less in income. Moreover, they were compelled without delay to marry and make settlements on their daughters. Expenditure and habits were completely altered. M. Balzac had just taken, through friends, a house at Villeparisis, eighteen miles from Paris. It was there that the family was about to transfer its belongings, dismissing one servant, and drawing tighter the strings of its comfortable life, which had allowed unlimited expenditure on dress and on the table. Mme

Balzac and her girls were, whatever Honoré thought, carefully and elegantly dressed, and, M. Balzac having for some months past ridden to death the absolute necessity of a varied system of nourishment in which uncooked foods rich in vital principles were as essential as cooked, the family spent a good half hour extra in the dining-room every day consuming a series of dishes which promised them all prolonged youth. The mode of life was drawing to its close. Moreover, the change would not be difficult for the girls in the indifference of youth, or for the mother, to whom such abrupt changes were second nature, or to the father, who was fancy-led. But Honoré, the headstrong, stubborn, and senseless Honoré, who all too clearly did not want to go to Villeparisis, who could never be compelled, who would ruin the family! For what would he do in Paris except cost them money? These were his mother's words. His father remained obstinately silent. He was too much a lover of liberty and even of literature to offer any violent opposition to his son's wish, but, still hurt, he withheld his sympathy from him. Without comment he calculated his resources and wore himself out to find some arrangement. He found it. He submitted it to the mother, who, violently angry, transmitted it to Honoré in such a way that it appeared a punishment. But Honoré, like his father, lived in his imagination. An attic in Paris. Fifteen hundred francs to live on. He was wild with joy! This was salvation, happiness! And even if, as his mother warned him, this meant appalling hardship, he was not frightened by the prospect. He was almost ready to love suffering, the price of glory. His face had set in harder lines; he had grown thinner; and drily he answered Mme Balzac, who was always so dry herself, that he accepted — with gratitude! Good. The word

slipped out. Never mind! He did not regret it. He was sunk in dreams. He longed for his solitary life. Twenty years old, the age of energy! He was about to begin his life as a writer. Courage, audacity, genius! the essential things. In Paris he would have all that.

So it was a solemn moment when in August 1819, on a day of relentless heat, he took possession of his garret in the rue Lesdiguières, two steps from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. A hand-cart had been loaded for him with some broken-down furniture, a trunk full of clothes and linen, packets of old papers and books. Mme Balzac, who was moving house in clouds of dust, embraced him as she delivered a final challenge.

"Off you go, my boy. Write your masterpieces! And do not forget that in that profession there is no middle state; you must be king — or be only a labourer."

Honoré turned towards his sister and said cheerfully: "Don't be anxious, Laure, my dear, I shall be king." Then he forced himself to ask: "Where is papa? —" His father had vanished. No one had seen him. Honoré went away.

In the street his heart swelled, but the bustle of the passers-by distracted him, and all of a sudden as he entered his room he felt himself as strong as a lion.

He carried his table up himself, the table on which he was going to write and make himself famous. He installed it in front of the dormer window, through which the sun fell in rays of gold, in rays of fire, took off his coat, threw it on the ground, opened his shirt, wiped his face, laughed and hammered on the table: "It's between us two! They'll soon see!"

He recalled abruptly that he had already used this phrase when, a very little boy at the grammar school at Vendôme, he was enduring the mockery of his comrades.

So he had not changed. It was an old idea that he was realizing. He shouted for joy at this thought.

The man with the handcart came upon his shouting: "Well, here's a happy young gentleman!"

"Madly happy! Put your parcels down there. Molière and Corneille? Good! My coffee-pot? Splendid! We'll put everything in its place, and I shall be the centre of it all. Can you understand people having flats, houses, palaces? Here everything is just at hand, table, bed, arm-chair, chest, bookshelves! A civilized life, coherent, concentrated, tense, as it ought to be! If Cousin, M. Cousin, the professor at the Sorbonne, were to come in and see it, he would say: "I can imagine what sort of work will emerge from this room!"

The man was bewildered.

"Go down, my man, and bring up the rest of the things," Honoré ordered.

Dancing and singing, he settled himself in his room. It was a poverty-stricken workman's dwelling: in the sun that flooded it, he found it picturesque, homely, sympathetic. His room was bare, narrow, and stifling: there he was, with his papers and his strong will; life seemed to him good. He had brought everything he had scribbled since his childhood: verses on the Book of Job, a satirical short story, stanzas on *Robert le Diable*, a fragment on *Natural Religion*. He re-read it, smiled, arranged it all. He hung engravings on the wall, refilled his ink-well, prepared two quills, and he was conscious that he was beginning a unique task. Was there another young man capable of shutting himself up like that to undertake a great work? No! He would be alone in doing it. Ah, he knew what young people were! All infatuated with pleasure, without enthusiasm. It seemed as though present-day youth was burned out, after the

fiery epoch it had just lived through. Heavens! He felt so full of pride and hope! —

The first day, when the sun went down, taking a breath, mopping himself again, he began to write a letter to his sister, in which he told her all his happiness. He was ingenuous and gallant, and did not realize, heaven be praised, that with the courage of an angel he was beginning a struggle which is but the ordinary drama of youth when it is proud, ambitious, and in a hurry. And he was eager only to furnish his family with proofs of his capacity; it was not vanity which pricked him on; no matter; whatever may be the impulse, the incidents of the adventure are always the same. Youth would, and cannot. It feels that it possesses wings; there is no strength in them. It thinks to fly, and falls. Honoré declared: "I want to write!" So he took possession of his room, and believed himself to be happy. He seized a pen. — He did not know what to do with it. Twenty years is rich in will alone; its heart alone is visited by a generous blood; but the spirit is poor, since nothing but life makes it rich.

"Now," said Honoré, "first thing is to decide on my work!"

He contemplated his books, and the names of the authors.

"The right thing," he thought, "is to saturate myself in great works."

And he plunged into Beaumarchais, Molière, Voltaire, Rousseau. A thousand ideas sparkled in his mind. But a sparkle has only a little time to live. He imagined that this fire was his own; he took it from men of genius; he could not keep it, but was galvanized by it. In three days he conceived a romance of which he already had the title, *Coqsigrue*, a comic opera, a play in verse. In-

numerable brief conceptions, fruitless impulses, beginnings, after which our Honoré found himself faced by a realization — of what was lacking in him for such vast subjects. Then, with lowered head, he gave himself up again to his books. Ideas came to him at once, always brief, but always brilliant, and he spent thus several days full of joyous illusions.

At last, after having thought it essential to nourish himself up to the last moment on great works, he felt that he must select and begin. He had just read two volumes by Villemain on *Cromwell*. This great man roused him to a high pitch of excitement. He felt that he could write on him a superb play; that is to say, a play in verse. He even saw it being played at the Comédie Française. The memory of successes at this theatre decided him. A play on Cromwell seemed to him a magnificent idea; he looked no farther.

Sitting at his table he drew a scheme; then another; then he stretched himself on his bed to make a third. From time to time he listened to the noises of the house and to the dull far-off sound of the great city. At these times he had the impression that he was the one stable point in the midst of the general restlessness; the whole world was flitting from one thing to another; he alone was digging down to the depths. He was Cromwell or Charles I. What did these men think? How did they act? Honoré shut his eyes and tried to supplement his lack of experience by inventions, which pleased him only for an instant. Then, when he felt that his head was full of smoke, without very much fire, he wrote his sister a charming letter, easy, mocking, sparkling with life, wit, humanity, naturalness, all those gifts which go to the making of masterpieces, but which all slipped like water between his fingers as soon as he turned to his drama in verse.

I

A friend of his parents, M. Dablin, came to visit him one Sunday in his attic, a few days after he had established himself there. He was an ironmonger, of whom M. Balzac the elder said: "Our worthy ironmonger!" and whom Honoré called: "Dear little father Dablin!" which might lead one to believe that he had a well-rounded stomach and more than thirty years of business behind him. He had only thirty-seven years in all, but he was so grave and prudent that the irony of his friends described him exactly. He sold gridirons, fire-irons, and boilers, with ruthless energy, working more than twelve hours a day, not even bothering to nail down the cases when a consignment was urgent. There never lived a worthier man, the soul of honour. His appearance was dismal, his temper phlegmatic, his forehead narrow, but as soon as the opportunity presented itself of rendering a service or speaking of art and artists, of theatres and actresses, of which, moreover, he spoke only as a very inexperienced and ignorant tradesman, he became all at once filled with ingenuous, almost chaste, excitement.

When he had heard from Honoré what the young man was going to attempt, he had embraced him, saying: "Ah, my boy, that's splendid! I am delighted with you. And I wish you success with all my heart." Then, one Sunday, he arrived out of breath, an enormous parcel under his arm. The great work was not going well; Honoré was sullen. Dablin did not notice it, and, mopping himself, he began to tell stories about Mlle Mars, "such tales — quite unbelievable," picked up the evening before in a café. Honoré remained unimpressed. He did not find them at all amusing.

Then Dablin added: "My boy, if you could write a comic play something after the fashion of the things I

have just been telling you, I guarantee you a real success."

Honoré did not want to say anything annoying; nevertheless he burst out: "My poor little father Dablin! Do you think that wit interests me?"

"What, wit doesn't ——"

"Wit! I despise it! I hate it! It is the motive of all second-rate works. Who in this country has not got wit? Wit! Do you think I would have buried myself under this roof, determined to endure everything, simply to write witty plays? Wit! What I want to do is what no one will do, no one!"

He had folded his arms, and his eyes blazed. All this time M. Dablin was burdened with his enormous package. Honoré went on: "What on earth have you got there?"

"Nothing," said the other, blushing and looking round him.

"Now you're annoyed."

"Oh, Honoré!"

"Come, let's see it."

He resigned himself. It was a chimney back chosen from his stock, but there was not a sign of a chimney in the garret.

"Oh, dear little father Dablin," cried Honoré, "let me embrace you. You are a better man than I: you love me. I am a goat. I am ashamed of myself. I have been talking nothing but nonsense to you. If I could write a fine comedy, yes, a fine witty comedy ——"

"Ah, that's it! — Bless us! — That's what I thought myself," said the ironmonger eagerly, tears filling his eyes. "I'll take away my chimney back and I'll bring you a surprise, for making your coffee."

M. Dablin gone, Honoré found himself with no heart

for it when he faced again the scheme of his *Cromwell.* He felt it hateful to remain sitting in front of his table, and he made a little plot with himself. He needed an analysis of grief. Where could he study it? "I shall find," he said to himself, "what I want at Père Lachaise!" He seized his hat and escaped from his room.

He had gone out confident; he came back bitter. The macabre comedy of this Parisian cemetery! How often, in their desire to advertise their grief, did men spoil that noblest dignity of life — death! "Judging by the tomb-stones," muttered Honoré, descending with an angry stride towards Paris, "all wives are faithful, all mothers adored, all children are the sons of their fathers. There are none but honest pork-butchers, honourable lawyers, and heroic soldiers!" Reality was too stupid. It was absolutely essential to raise oneself to lyric heights. Now, to be lyrical it was not necessary to have lived; it was enough to feel with more intensity than other people.

He took heart again.

Cromwell ——

Yes, but as soon as he was back in his room, Paris drew him once more. Had he been right, after all, in picking a drama of which the action took place in England, in the seventeenth century? Would he not have been safer in relating some story from Parisian history? No! In the first place he must astonish his family. Next, in following in the footsteps of Corneille and Racine did he run so much risk of losing himself? He had only to follow them closely. — He opened them again to look for models and inspiration. And he embarked upon his first monologue, of which the rhythm and the ideas struck him as rather happy.

He chanted his verses to himself as he wandered about

the boulevard du Temple. He saw fashionable couples going into the Restaurant du Cadran-Bleu. Those people were going to pay fifty francs a head for their dinner! Taking the standard of his present work, he ventured a calculation of the titanic labours he would have to accomplish in order to achieve by his pen a position in society which would permit him to indulge in such extravagances, useful nevertheless to a mind that wished to observe and learn.

Back in his house, he found it sordid, his room icy, his bed wretched, and he fell asleep with the taste of ashes in his mouth. When he awoke, he re-read his monologue. His body was rested and his mind clear. And he saw that this was not Racine; it was no more than "after Pradon."

From that day he felt, with the coming of winter, something like a settled despair take up its abode in him, to fight which he had only one weapon, his will. Since he willed to write *Cromwell* in the world's despite, he would write *Cromwell,* but he no longer felt himself inspired. That was over. He had aimed too high. —

At last he even began to comfort himself with the thought that genius may be only an infinite patience, and Boileau a great poet, as certain people affected to think. He was further reassured by the thought that in this world there was no agreement on anything, whatever it might be. So that what he judged commonplace, was perhaps not commonplace. — Then on a sudden, like a thunder-clap, his conscience turned and rent him. He called himself a coward. On what could he rely if not on his judgment? If he was ill at ease, it was because he was not doing good work! But if that were true! Must he confess to weeks wasted? Confess that he had consumed his father's substance to no purpose at

all? Must he burn all he had written? Racine's first tragedy no more than his was famous, and it had not yet been burned! No, no, it was all the more essential for him to write at first what he could, that he might come one day to writing what he would. And this was not for that reason defeat. Napoleon too was alone on the rock of Saint Helena. Napoleon was suffering, eating his heart out, and unlike Honoré he had not the future to look forward to.

"Tragedy will not kill me," he said to himself, comforted afresh by this thought. "It is I who will twist its neck!"

After which, he lived for two months almost without stirring from his room. The cold had compelled him to roll himself round and round in wraps and an old coachman's coat, sent by his sister. He was benumbed and stiff with cold as he sat at his *Cromwell.* He hardly stirred from arm-chair to bed, where, moreover, he ended by spending whole days, ceaselessly writing, setting his verses in order, and dropping ink on the bedclothes. One more scene finished! — He rubbed his hands and beat his shoulders, to get at once a little warmth and to express his satisfaction.

Once he went out to draw his number for military service. A lucky number. He was not to be a soldier. Back again in his room, he asked himself whether it would not have been better for him if he were. But since he was not, back to *Cromwell,* always *Cromwell!* They had taken his height. Five feet six. "How tall was Shakspere?" he wondered, returning to his task.

He suffered from chilblains, as in his school-days; then from frightful toothache. But he swallowed and digested his sufferings, as it were, and continued to rhyme.

Hardened, his heart frozen, and his very spirit caloused, his tongue losing its habit of speech, unrestingly chewing the cud of his ideas, true or false, lost in the middle of this crowded Paris as completely as though he had been in a desert, he had become a Voltairian of the most arid order and the prey of egoistical theories, which scorched without warming him and led him to sneer at society and religion. To think that, at the age of twelve, he had imagined that God hid himself behind the clouds, whence he watched benevolently over mankind and helped them in their activities. Childish nonsense, which only reverend fathers were able to believe! They and their like never had to struggle! And they have never contemplated Paris, that monstrous city, where misery and luxury rub elbows in mutual antagonism! Honoré, badly fed, living in his dirty linen, rich only in book-learning, poor in experience, began to lose faith in his dearest convictions.

In his room, in the course of several months, sun, dust, and infiltrations had ruined everything. The wall was blackened; the books had turned yellow; the flooring muddy; the table stained. The chest of drawers contained bundles of flannel shirts, still waiting a laundress, who was not to be found, ten pairs of socks, in complete disorder and with as many holes as a net, and handkerchiefs which looked as though they had been used to wipe the roof. Night alone was friendly to this attic of misery. But Honoré was as wretched as it. It was as black in his soul as on the staircase.

It might have been sufficient to light it up if he had learned of his father's visit to the lodge porter. But he never knew about it.

Since their separation M. Balzac had never given his son a sign of life. No one at Villeparisis dared to speak

of Honoré in his presence. His wife, who did not understand him, his daughters, who did not know him, believed him to be wrapped in his resentment. His heart was swelling with affection, but he would not have shown it for the world, in his overwhelming dread of appearing weak, and it was without his family's knowledge that one day, passing through Paris, he called at the rue Lesdiguières, as if he had been a stranger, and questioned about his child the two odd human animals who looked after the house. The man was unintelligent and dumb. The woman talked for talking's sake.

M. Balzac listened to the woman, who said: "Oh, as for behaving himself, he behaves himself very well indeed! He's almost like a girl, that boy. He is so shy, and blushing, and thinks about nothing but hiding himself and writing. What does he write? You may well ask! Find out if you can! The rest of us know nothing about where he comes from. — But my own idea is, and you won't get me to believe anything else, that he must have a father who is half mad."

"Why a father?" M. Balzac asked, pensively.

"Well," said the other, "he's as if he'd shut himself up in prison of his own accord! There are them as have committed murder who aren't shut up any closer than him!"

Huddled in the corner of the coach which was taking him back to Villeparisis, M. Balzac reflected on the unfathomable nature of man, Honoré's nature and his own. Why did the boy condemn himself to such a life? He must have a very strong vocation. And why had he himself not been able to overcome his fear of what people would think, and climb six flights of stairs to embrace his boy?

"Papa — papa," Laure said to him after dinner that

same day (she was trembling a little) — "I have had a letter from Honoré. — He has finished a tragedy in verse."

"No — has he really?" M. Balzac said, softly, his face suddenly glowing with pleasure. "But this is a splendid bit of news, little girl! —" (He took snuff, gave a fillip to his white cravat, and took her affectionately by the shoulders.) "You must write to him at once and tell him to come and read it to us."

The next morning a letter was sent to Honoré, such a letter as only a loving sister could have written. It was ecstatic, appealing, and full of foolish things. It brought the tears to Honoré's eyes, and he answered: "Coming!"

A fortnight later, on a Sunday, he arrived at Villeparisis. He was moved; he was not happy.

It was towards the end of April 1820. A cold, bleak wind shook the blossoming fruit-trees, and, for all that delicate pink and white finery, the country-side was sad. Sad the wide, paved roads, planted with melancholy elms. Sad the mud-coloured plains. Sad the village, with its tall buildings in monotonous rows. Sad the Balzac house, between a slip of courtyard and a featureless garden. Sad, doubtless, the welcome awaiting him? —

No! Surprising beyond measure! His welcome was charming, overwhelming, intoxicating. Laure and Laurence embraced him, caressed him, held him close. He felt their soft hair on his face. And Laure, with wet eyes, stammered: "I've a surprise for you. — I didn't want to write to you about it. — I'm engaged, Honoré darling!"

"It's quite true," said Mme Balzac, coming forward. Before placing two precise kisses on his cheeks, she cried: "Oh! — How thin you've grown, my son! My word, we shall have to feed you up again."

I

"How are you, Honoré?" M. Balzac spoke in his most natural voice. "Well? What's the latest political news? What are they saying in Paris? Are they satisfied with the Duc de Richelieu? . . . What? You're regretting Decazes? Ah, I thought as much! The scoundrel!"

The strain relaxed. Honoré opened his arms and thought: "Lord, how I wish that my *Cromwell* was a magnificent success!" The door opened. It was Laure's fiancé, M. Surville, a civil engineer. Introduction. General gaiety. And they sat down to the table.

An excellent lunch. They had killed a duck specially. They had a light white Vouvray to drink. When Honoré had drunk three glasses, his heart warmed and he could quite clearly perceive that a dozen or more passages in his tragedy were sublime.

The talk flowed on. The younger children were delighted. It seemed to Honoré that M. Balzac had offered the grandmother, Mme Sallambier, wine before she asked for it. Even the weather brightened. "We could go for a walk!" said M. Balzac.

"Oh," put in Laure, "after Honoré's reading."

"Of course," said M. Balzac.

"What reading?" asked M. Surville.

"A tragedy," said M. Balzac.

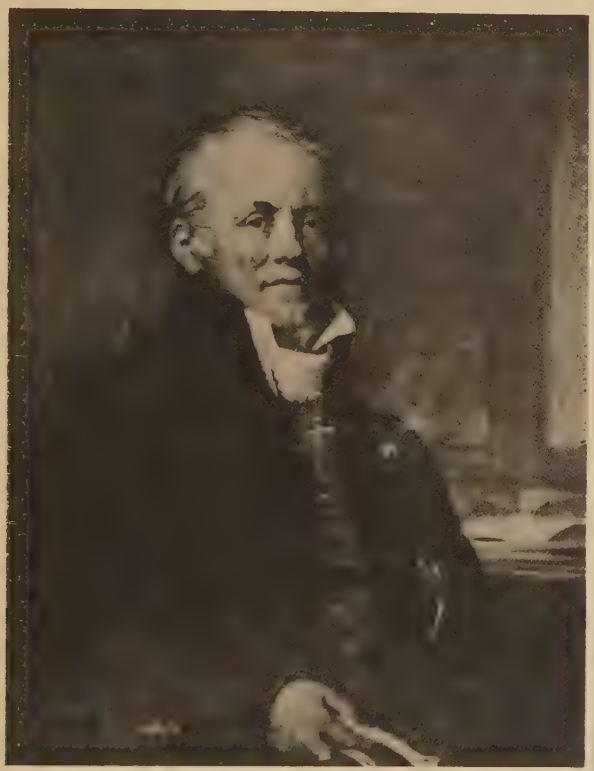
"On Cromwell," said the mother.

"Oh, it will be such fun!" cried Laure, clapping her hands.

And Honoré smiled. He thought that he was going to read well. He could rather intone the weaker passages. He felt adroit, full of energy, sure of himself. It would not astonish him at this moment to know that God did exist.

"The sun has come out!" said Mme Sallambier.

"Hurrah! Coffee quickly, and up with the curtain!" cried M. Balzac.



Balzac's Father. From a painting by Mlle Godefroid

"Shall we go outside?" asked Mme Balzac.

"No, no, one's voice doesn't carry well outside," said M. Surville, who was overflowing with affection. He loved not only the young girl, but the house, her parents, the furniture, his new brother-in-law, and the drama on Cromwell in advance.

Honoré looked at him and grew fond of him as well; and a quarter of an hour later, in the pleasant drawing-room, which smelt of apples, when he began: "Act one, scene one!" in a voice that strove vainly for assurance, it was this affectionate young man on whom he first fixed his eyes. —

Alas! Thrice alas! — The promise held out by the lover, the best of welcomes, a very good lunch, the Vouvray, failed at the end of thirty verses, even as did Honoré's voice. Why? It was he himself who all at once lost confidence, at a silly rhyme; it was he himself who lost his head, reddened; he himself who cleared his throat and said: "It's not easy to read. — It was written to be acted. —" Then two pages further on: "I had perhaps better give it to you. —" One more page and: "I say — I don't want to prevent that walk ——"

Everyone was embarrassed. M. and Mme Balzac said politely that they could not judge ——

"Go on, go on!" said Laure.

"Please do go on!" said M. Surville.

"Let's go out," said Honoré.

They could not insist further. Since he wanted to ——

"Is it — is it all in Alexandrines?" M. Balzac asked simply, a little wistfully.

"Yes, papa, of course —" answered Honoré, without bitterness, wistful himself. They went out into the garden. — An inner voice kept on saying to Honoré: "Bad — my poor friend. — Bad. — Undoubtedly bad."

I

The children began to talk of the forthcoming wedding: dresses and presents. And the flowers for the church? Had any arrangement been come to with the *curé?*

Honoré listened without hearing a word. There was an end of *Cromwell.* Heavens! Surely no member of the family would ever speak of it again! This was the day of which he had dreamed for a year. And it was a frightful failure. Another person would have been filled with resentment and hate, and tried to shift the blame. But he, in his defeat, had far too sharp a sense of the truth not to perceive it and accept it; and he was far too honest not to accuse himself, from the very first, without false show. — So while they were walking across the *curé*'s little garden, which, under the first spring sunshine, proffered here and there a few humble promises, he remained behind; he felt in himself an infinite humility and admitted to himself courageously that he had wanted to write a great work — and that he had completely failed.

3

Once Laure was married and gone, and bustle had given way to silence, Honoré, in his room, drew his little moral balance-sheet.

On the profit side, and unexpected at that, he placed first the kindness of his family, which never flagged. M. Surville, with much affection, had prevailed upon him to give him his tragedy and had taken it to one of his old masters at the École Polytechnique, M. Andrieux, who, to be sure, had returned it with a harsh judgment. But then M. and Mme Balzac had objected that there was no infallible opinion. "Once your sister

is married," Mme Balzac had said, "I will copy out your play. Our friend M. Pépin-Lehalleur knows somebody at the Théâtre Français. We shall try to get it there. We must try every means." — "And all the more," the father had gone on to say, "because — it's no more boring than anything else! As far as I am concerned, *Cinna* bores me to death!" And Mme Balzac, once the china and silver which had done duty at the wedding had been put away, and the house all tidied up again, now spent three hours copying every day. Honoré offered no objection.

Another item of profit was material existence, which was pleasant at Villeparisis. A comfortable feather-bed, choice cooking, clean linen: such little delights as there, at any rate, he had not stolen.

Profit likewise, the pageant of spring, the sight of young shoots, of young birds falling out of the nest, of every burgeoning. He would say to himself: "Observe how strong and wise nature is! Try to imitate it!"

But on the side of loss he was obliged to set Paris, to which he was sick to return after only three weeks' absence. It wasn't his garret, that tomb in the skies, which he regretted, but the streets, in the evening especially, when the dusk made them mysterious, and the passers-by, both rich and poor, appeared invested in romance. Then he thought he would make a multitude of fruitful observations concerning them. And Père Lachaise! The inscriptions upon the tombs there were sadder than death itself, but how beautiful that cemetery was, overhanging the city, and inspiring you with the desire, when you have a foot upon the dead, whilst your eyes embrace the houses of eight hundred thousand living souls, not to let yourself die before having lived a more glorious life than the others. At Villeparisis there was

no incentive. Everything was predisposed to make life slow and dismal. Earth yielded its fruit unhurryingly, and all the animals, even when they were beautiful, were sad.

But what else was he to do? He found himself confronted by this dilemma: either to go on writing for writing's sake; or to wait until he had lived, but — how was he to live? He could not go on living and not write. He had told Dr. Nacquart, the family doctor, who had been officially entrusted with the task of finding, if he could, amongst his acquaintances "something for Honoré": "Doctor, I'll take nothing! I swear it by your head and my own, by science and literature! Not at any price do I want what is called by the disgusting name of a *job*. I am not and never will be a hack!"

So of his own free will he condemned himself once again to take up the pen. Everybody, in the country, worked. Since he didn't want to raise chickens, or to till the soil, he had to start upon a fresh manuscript. In his room, where the checked wall-paper absorbed his mind without giving him any ideas, he began to yawn over the plan for a novel. Novels were in fashion. They were being published on all sides; people read chiefly translations of Walter Scott, and this was most clearly indicated to Honoré to do, because the novelist of Edinburgh gave him self-confidence.

Once or twice he tried to get his father to read it; the attempt was a vain one. M. Balzac declared that novels were the opium of western peoples. And when he was alone with his son, he added: "They're good for women — who perhaps, after all, need them." Concerning women he was always jovial and sceptical. He would say to Honoré: "That's what I should do if I were in your place: a book on marriage.— But not a novel — a book of experience!"

"But that's just what I haven't got," Honoré would object.

"Really? And didn't your grandfathers acquire any for you? And what about heredity? What do you make of that? Listen to your grandfathers speaking! At night, if you wake up, there are salutary moments, when you are all fresh, quite simple! Lend an ear: they are speaking in you. And you'll see what they will all tell you: that woman, my little chap, proceeds like a flea, by leaps and bounds, inconsequently! She escapes by the height or depth of her first impressions, and as it is impossible to understand anything more, there are only two solutions: either to crush her or to be devoured by her!"

He spoke in this savage strain, the while he laughed with real enjoyment. And Honoré began to think of the curious household his father and mother composed, of his bustling mother, his crotchety grandmother, the lusty vigour of his father, whom he had caught with a farm servant in his arms, and finally the supreme problem of women, before which men are weak, though they believe themselves to be strong. A mistress — how glowing and absorbing the word was! Would he have one some day? Would he ever deserve to have one? A beautiful woman, worthy to be worshipped by a heart which he felt to be overflowing. He clenched his fists and heaved a sigh: "Isn't there a woman in the world somewhere for me?" He remembered bewitching faces which he had fallen in love with at lectures in the Sorbonne, profiles he had caught sight of at the theatre. Paris, for ever Paris! It was in Paris, by heaven, that he would fall in love, for Paris held all that was lovable!

But the days kept slipping by, and after a year he returned to the city of his dreams only to renew ac-

quaintance with some young men who had an entrée to the newspapers. And he brought back from Paris the desire to love, but no love.

Now, in the beginning of June 1821, Mme Balzac, who was on terms of friendship with a lady in the neighbourhood, Mme de Berny, intimated that she had asked this lady, her husband, and her two grown-up daughters, "charming young girls," to come to tea the following Sunday. The epithet "charming," applied to "young girls," exasperated Honoré, who believed, without the slightest grounds, that his mother had inserted it for his benefit, and he grumbled that on the day in question he would go for a walk, that he didn't like young girls, simpering pusses ("Thanks!" remarked Laurence), and that those who were coming were in all the worse plight for being the daughters of a magistrate; he couldn't stick Civil Servants ("Thanks!" remarked M. Balzac).

"But there's the mother," said Mme Balzac, "who is perfectly delightful."

"How old is she?" inquired Honoré.

"Three years older than I."

"Then how do you imagine that I can talk to her?" said Honoré.

"Thanks!" remarked Mme Balzac.

On the 11th of June, at two o'clock, Honoré was in the drawing-room, surrounded by his family, waiting for the de Bernys, having given up all thought of protesting, because, since he had shown such ill temper, nobody had asked him either to compel himself or to remain. His pose was one of mere indifference, and he had resolved to say only a few words, as amongst men, neglecting the women as being either too young or too matronly, and used to breathing only the vapid atmosphere of Villeparisis. But suddenly he beheld three white

dresses, fresh, lovely, and full of life, enter the room; he saw limpid eyes, bright lips, and a mother — who, although she was inclined to be buxom, seemed to be her daughters' sister, and who was unpretentious, kind, agreeable, and much moved at having to impart a piece of grievous news which her husband had just been told: the Emperor had died, a month ago, at Saint Helena!

Died! Napoleon! The great man! Good heavens! When? How? — Honoré, quite close to her, had already asked twenty questions. And now he felt at once terrified and delighted, because he was discovering a woman who seemed to him perfectly charming, and from her mouth, which was full of kindness and pity, he was learning the cruel end of the man to whom his soul, from all time, had vowed the most ardent admiration.

"Ah, madame! You admired him also, did you not?"

"Is there a true Frenchman that did not admire him?"

What an admirable thing to say! How candid her eyes were! And how well that silk belt fitted her waist, matching the blue of her eyes!

"Madame — tell us every particular you know. He wants to be buried on the banks of the Seine? Were Bertrand and Montholon there? What did he say when he was dying?"

He forgot the husband, the young girls, his own family. He monopolized her, made her speak, looked at her, listened to her; himself, he began to speak, full of fire, overflowing with emotion, and he astonished her; she began to listen to him in her turn, and suddenly turned thoughtful before this tall youth of twenty, who was so ardently fond of great men — and women also, no doubt.

Surprised and confused, but with more caution, she

now turned towards Mme Balzac and told her all that she remembered of the execution of Louis XVI, her illustrious god-parent, but, agitated as she was, she could not tell without emotion that the executioner executed him with his hat on his head, and then threw to the people the white, quilted coat, which was immediately torn into shreds by a thousand hands!

As far as Honoré was concerned, she had told him quite enough. He had guessed what sort of a woman she was. She was an aristocrat. Her history was a magnificent one, for the most illustrious names were mingled with her life. She represented the time when the royal family was in distress and pitiful. Again, she lived, at the far end of the village, in a gentleman's house, where all that was best in the *ancien régime* was to be found. Had she herself not such grace of person as would make the most prosaic heart grow lyrical? One felt that she had been bruised. She could not be happy. It did not look as though her husband had very great intelligence. — Perhaps she had never been in love. — Supposing she were waiting for love?

As soon as he asked himself this question, he became more shy, drew away, and began to engage the young girls in conversation; but at a distance he exerted his will, he sent her his soul, for the first time in his life he endeavoured seriously to control the magnetic forces in which he had believed in a confused way ever since he had attained the age of reason. Ah! — She had looked at him! Again! — Once more! — He could bear it no longer. He went over to her. Had she read Paul Louis Courier's pamphlet on the Château de Chambord? It had amused him, oh! hadn't it just! — Well, she hated everything of that sort! She believed herself to be a liberal, but, none the less, such mean behaviour saddened her.

"Admirable woman!" said Honoré to himself, convinced upon the spot. Not a touch of vulgarity, and all there was about her was her very own!

And thereupon he felt that he was being led by fate — or Providence. That was the explanation: God organized our lives. He had a plan for all of us. And if Honoré had been stagnating for a year at Villeparisis, it was not to grow numb there, to go to sleep, and to end his days there; it was to make love, for there was the woman of his dreams, still very young despite her — what age was she? What did it matter? Nature and society had endowed her with every kind of accomplishment; she was the woman he had been looking for, to whom he would devote his life, a knight's life, full of courage and self-sacrifice!

He had not the slightest excuse for going to her house the day after, but he went. He said that he was taking a walk. He introduced himself clumsily.

"Oh!" she observed, "my husband will be so sorry. He is in Paris."

He brightened up. Three children came in; he frowned. Then, as he sat down, he said: "Ah, madame, how your husband — and your daughters must love you!"

It was the season of sighs beginning.

Mme de Berny was at first very reserved, kind but aloof, with the skill to ignore an open declaration, and like an honest woman, instead of making herself out younger than she was, she straightway spoke about her grown-up children, her married daughter and her son-in-law, and in talking to Honoré assumed a maternal tone.

There lurked the danger! He had never in the least been able to open his soul to his mother. He was being stifled by the necessity of unburdening himself and

giving the rein to his headlong feelings. He spoke to her, in a voice touched with emotion, of his youth full of desires, of life requiring warmth, of society failing to recognize its dynamic forces. He talked for the sake of talking, to feel emotion. And he was specially moved by the fact that she listened to him. On the way he had prepared certain phrases: "Everything you say, madame, is important to me! The slightest word of yours seems momentous to me, and reverberates in my heart!" He didn't utter these phrases: he was too much upset. He noticed upon her cheeks, near her neck, a little down, which made her skin soft and silky. And she was wearing a dress of white cashmere with a Persian design, which he desired to handle and to caress. She was attractive in it, for she had such a becoming figure. He left, very unhappy, to go home.

Twenty-four hours later he was bringing her some books. He came back again to fetch them. He suggested teaching the youngest son. Often he would come in the morning, after having tramped in the dew of the meadows. He would surprise her in her house wearing a muslin bonnet with ribbons, which made her look so sweet! The servants began to whisper amongst themselves. — And in the evening he was to be seen again, always walking with quick strides and clumsy, coming at the time when the sick are feverish and the hearts of lovers begin to beat and upset the reason. He had just come from reading Rousseau. He was chock-full of enthusiasms, impulses, and apostrophes. In the end she had to say to him, in a trembling voice: "My dear, please, do you consider?"

"What, in heaven's name?"

"That I shall not be able to let you come like this any more."

"Me? What have I done?"

"Child that you are! — I am a woman — you are a man. —"

How the words fired him! One would have said that she picked them expressly. — Decidedly only God can see clear into the hearts of human beings, once love begins to confuse everything therein. It may be that she sincerely thought only of defending herself, but, already impelled by her affection for a character which was all candour and generosity and expansion, in the method which she employed of giving him warning she confessed her own distress. To point out the danger was to inspire a taste for it. And then what wonderful eyes that woman had! So pale, and suddenly gilded with emotion. And her voice! The breath of her soul was in it. And why, above all why, when he left that day, did she take his hand and place it on her heart? Heavens! He had felt how soft her bosom was. He came out with his heart aflame and his feet stumbling, and the elms of the avenue and the mossy stone benches might have heard him stammering passionate words: "You! — You! — Oh, my darling! — Oh, my best beloved!"

Thenceforward he wanted to absorb her entire life. He asked for meetings in fields and farm-houses. And with warmth and persistence he spoke of friendship, of friendship pure, pure and chaste, and of the union of souls. That was the proof to her that she would have to surrender. In truth, neither one nor the other knew whither they were going. When she had reduced him to despair by a reasonable refusal, he exclaimed: "Very well, then! All that is left for me now to do is to leave for the Indies or America!" But whilst stopping behind, he did not know what would happen. This ignorance was ever the source of their greatest emotion. He had

no knowledge of women at all. He had no assurance whatever that she would become his mistress. He desired it with all his heart. But he did not believe that it depended on himself alone: she had her rights; she would have the last word. And if she so pleased, he would betake himself off in despair! In the honesty of his extreme youth he would not even try to persuade her. Only before her face he wailed and suffered: "All I ask you for is a little sympathy, a little open-heartedness! I tell you everything; do you tell me something, do!" Then suddenly: "I know very well that you are not happy. But look here, I hate your husband!"

She would never give a direct answer. She would try to soothe him down. "Come, come, now; since you're so friendly disposed to me, work for my sake. Write a beautiful book!"

And next day he would send her a letter which had been prepared ten times in rough copy, and some childish verses, at which she was deeply moved:

When the rose turns aside its graceful head,
It slights the butterfly!

From time to time he would come to see her in livelier mood, bubbling over with spirits: "All hail, madame! It is I, Balzac, Honoré, French poet and notary public."

She was constrained to throw a cold douche upon such effervescence by giving him warnings: "I am afraid of my daughters, you know! I am afraid they have an inkling of something. —"

"Of what, conceivably? Well, now, isn't that a fine piece of news?" exclaimed Honoré sneeringly. "At that rate, there is something between us? But do tell me what it is, please!" And he struck a melodramatic attitude.

For the sake of appearance she had to turn the con-

versation into another channel, but she knew in her heart that the time for conversation, whatever the topic might be, had gone for good.

Laurence was about to marry. "I have seen the young man's mother," she began to say; "as explosive as a powder magazine. She would set everything on fire!"

Instead of laughing, Honoré began to wail: "Marriage is always quite the opposite from —— It is never those who ought and those who —— Now, what about us — oughtn't we to ——"

She took his hand. "Great silly!"

Then he began to grow cross, become childish, babble, and be touching. "Heavens, if I were a woman," he grumbled, "and my name were Laure ——"

"Be good enough to address me by my proper name!"

"That's precisely what I am doing! — Laure — Laure de Berny — oh, how differently I should behave from you!"

"Really?"

"Farewell! I'm off! It's the last time I am seeing you, because it kills me to see you. — I don't want to see you any more. I want too much to say the most absurd things to you — to call you my own — oh, my darling, my darling!"

"Honoré!"

"Thanks! You have indeed called me by my name!"

"Keep away."

"No, I will remain! And I will come back! You are all my life! And I feel that I shall do great things for you, Laure!"

"Sit down, will you, please?"

"Heavens! how lovely you are! Thirty and not a day more! Lord! how can you still refuse to pluck the apple which ruined your first parents?"

"Are you mad? — What are you talking about? Go away! You make me blush! What impudence! You have never spoken to me like this before! I do not want you to come back, do you hear? — Not to-morrow, at all events, I will not see you to-morrow!"

"To-morrow I am going to Paris; you will come there?"

"No!"

"I expect you at the Théâtre Français."

"Never!"

"Laure!"

"You will make me die of fright; my husband will be coming in."

"So much the better! I hate him! I will tell him so. Give me your hand."

"For heaven's sake, let me be! My daughters will hear!"

"Your daughters! I love your daughters — but they need a support in life. And you know that I will be that, when you give yourself to me."

"What is he saying? What's the matter with him?"

"Until to-morrow, at the Théâtre Français."

"Let me alone ——"

"Laure, my Laure, you are wonderful! As Rousseau says of his dear mistress, your lips fit mine exactly."

The gentle Mme de Berny held out longer than Mme de Warens. If posterity, which is always circumspect and proper, takes any interest in love delayed, let it be grateful to her for her long struggle! But in love, a woman must always end by giving way unless she dies, or flees on the first evening. That woman had made a failure of her life. She had all the attractiveness of a beautiful autumn. She felt flattered at having such a young man in love with her. Let heaven be her judge:

it is no affair of men. For she gave herself one evening in spring, after two intoxicating meetings in her garden, after a myriad passionate promises and mad kisses, in a rapturous exclamation: "I am happy: I worship you! Now I can die: at last I have given happiness!"

"Only the last love of a woman," Honoré was to write later on, "can possibly satisfy the first love of a man." It is a strong truth, but it takes time for a man to become convinced of it. And the first embrace, so long coveted, is only mortification for him, in the act. The woman, as he thinks, is overlong in yielding. Then she abandons herself too quickly; too abruptly she discloses both her passion — and her years; and there comes an hour of cruel disappointment, of sullen bitterness, of sudden need for silence, recollection, and solitude.

If M. Balzac, who for several months past had been considering his son with great kindliness, even going so far as to say to his friends: "He is working — he is talented — I think he'll make a reputation" — if M. Balzac only watched Honoré closely, he must have understood everything when he saw his mood change with such brutal abruptness. One evening he talked and talked, with his cheeks all aflame; he made his whole family laugh; he imitated Pantagruel looking for Épistemon, then Panurge finding him out and sticking on his head again, after having first cleansed it with white wine. And Honoré displayed rare skill in mimicking Épistemon, coming back to life, coughing and sneezing and telling all that he had seen in Hades: Alexander patching up old hose to earn a wretched livelihood, Xerxes hawking mustard, Demosthenes a wine grower, Achilles all scurf, Priam selling old flags. And every one of them was in turn imitated by Honoré so amusingly that even Mme Balzac herself laughed, although she

complained of a terrible headache: "Marie, Marie" (the maid was being addressed), "shall I see the mustard bath for my feet this year?" Honoré, Honoré, that very evening you had received from Laure de Berny the wonderful, solemn promise that she would be yours! And a week later you were cramming linen and books into a travelling-bag and taking at day-break the stage-coach for Paris, and thence you were making your way to Bayeux, where your married sister lived! The pretext was a useless one: overwork, anæmia, and the air of Normandy, which would do him good.

Then, if he had any interest in matters of love, M. Balzac should have met Mme de Berny in the country walking all alone, pale and unkempt, in an old, unbecoming gown, weeping tears of blood!

But all that, perhaps, is necessary to rekindle passion to greater transports again.

Honoré returned from Bayeux a changed man, with clear eyes, a warm heart, all ready for love. Recklessly he ran straight to her house. Without rancour she exclaimed: "What have I done to you? What has happened?"

He kissed her forehead, her lips, her dear breasts, her hands, her knees, and said to her passionately: "We are lovers for life!" She required no further explanations.

Away from her, he had reflected that he owned a unique mistress. "She worships me. Woman errs only by passion!" When he saw her again, he was convinced of it. And overflowing with gratitude which knew no bounds, he wanted to win fame so as to thank her and dazzle her with honours. He must write a fine book and he would write it. He felt himself so rich, at the moment, in sentiments and sensations!

If she was passionate, he was without calculation: he

Balzac at 25. An engraving by A. Lepère, from a painting attributed to Achille Deveria

Balzac's sister, Laure de Balzac, afterwards Mme Surville

told her right out, with all the artlessness of his infatuation: "Darling, if you had gone on saying no to happiness, really it might have killed you! As for me, I hadn't begun to live! I have always kept down the generous impulses of my heart. You have saved me. Now all my will is at the service of my passion; I have grown up; I am going to do something splendid. You have read my *Cromwell*? Do you admire it?"

"No — or, at least, I do not think so. It is you I admire and love! And you are not in your *Cromwell*!"

"There now! In one word you have discovered what that fool Andrieux was unable to tell me! What an angel you are! But I shall be an archangel to you! Tragedy is not my job; I shall write novels. I shall be the Walter Scott of France. Just listen to the progress my literary career is making — I have sold *L'Héritière de Birague* for eight hundred francs; I have sold *Jean-Louis* for thirteen hundred francs. Do you know what price I have got for *Clotilde de Lusignan?*"

"Tell me at once."

"Two thousand francs!"

"My treasure!"

"Soon I shall be back from Paris, with eyes gleaming, head erect, and my pockets well lined! Soon the little stripling Honoré will be the most productive of authors and the most celebrated!"

Thereafter he congratulated himself upon never having taken any "job"! Some horrible little post which in six months kills its man, body and soul! How many dead of that sort were to be reckoned in society, and society, the fool, mourned only those who fell on the field of battle!

Mme de Berny admired and approved him. And he repaid her for both — in the first place, because it was

she now who reassured him concerning her daughters, her husband, and her servants: the rôles were reversed. "No, no," she would say, "nobody has any idea. — It is your imagination at work. — And then, if anybody had an idea, we should have to disarm suspicion, you understand, by lying very low. Come when you like; think only of me when you come: that will give you confidence."

And she was magnificent in the natural tact she displayed in keeping the importunate at arm's length, in anticipating suspicions, in countering with a more effusive affection Mme Balzac's stiff reserve, which showed that she had understood everything. And as for her, had she lived quite such a straight-laced life? Henry wasn't so terribly like his father. — And without mentioning that, at that time, marriage, solely a matter of interest, was too exacting an institution for anyone to be entitled to judge severely. "Judge me," Mme de Berny appeared to say, "but then judge yourself." And instead of indulging her grievance, Mme Balzac simply substituted ill temper, which was natural to her. She had just been reading *Clotilde de Lusignan*. She wrote her daughter a letter describing how bad it was and that, when he had read this novel of his aloud, Honoré had deceived them all by the way in which he had coloured and enlivened his characters and made them act. Yes, indeed! That was exactly what Mme de Berny had herself experienced to the very depth of her being! He had such a gift of enlivening things as nobody else in the world. How he did endow things with life! And there was nothing that she needed so much! Hers was in a languishing state: he had invigorated it anew. How could she deny him love? — And now she was making him love even the very defects of her body.

For that also he admired her in secret, after having owed her a grudge therefor, after having eschewed her presence, for he now thought that he could perceive her young and lively soul underneath a body just a little wrinkled — a soul unsullied, without a scar, all good and wonderful! She herself was unaware that her figure inclined to be stout and that the weariness of years had left traces upon some of her features. Sacred weariness, more touching than the radiance of youth! He was on his knees, all devoted and deeply moved.

There was nothing, moreover, that she couldn't tell him, and, as she was genuine, with no dissimulation and no self-interest, obeying only her emotion, which was reasonable, and her reason, which was governed by her emotions, she began to lead him and made him agree to truths proceeding from her beautiful lips which, when aridly enunciated by others, had merely repelled him. With that ingenuousness which is the highest quality of the most refined characters, she had the secret of mingling the warmest praise with the most delicate criticism: "Why, you are the egg of an eagle hatched by geese! — Oh, I know what your family is like! I make an exception of your father — but your mother has not understood you at all. Besides she never can see the important feature. She is steeped in insignificant trifles. Just a little more and she would have been the death of you. And your sisters ——"

"I won't have a word said against Laure!" Honoré would exclaim.

"Her mother's daughter! You will see in twenty years' time! — In short, your family has dwarfed you. And fashion in your house is unknown, I really must tell you — real fine manners, all that makes the poetry of home life. Don't think me old-fashioned; the old

habit of politeness has been quite lost. If you would allow me to check you, sweetheart, you whom I love and whom I want to see quite perfect, I could show you by little things ——"

"Oh, please, please do; I implore you to!" Honoré would burst out; "you are my darling little mother!"

No critical observation from her would have offended him. She was as devoid of self-conceit as she was free from pedantry, and he was well aware of her sole aim: the better to mould him to every different feeling of the heart, with which he was eager to beautify his life. So he was happy. He began to adopt the ideas which she had given him, and conceived them as images:

"What a family mine is, to be sure! Mother gets down from the stage-coach only to get up into it again. She'll become a postilion some day! She goes to Paris to buy a ball of thread. Dear little grandmother, who loves me, I know, and whom I love, I am sure, whom grandfather used to worship (oh, darling, he fainted right away when granny told him that she would willingly marry him!) — well, dear little grandmother sulks and grumbles, grumbles and sulks, so that one would swear it was her vocation! Whereas father, unmoved and immovable, deaf, dumb, and blind, standing like a pyramid amidst the tottering of the globe, shuts himself up in his room and devours the history of China in thirteen volumes!"

Mme de Berny would burst out laughing; "You have got genius! — Even too much — yes indeed, too much for society. — Before anyone you speak out just as you do before me! — You let your high spirits carry you away. It gives you pleasure. Be careful!"

"What," said Honoré, "can't one be sincere in society?"

"Yes, one can! And one even ought! But listen" (and she would place her arm round his neck). "A man of breeding is just as sincere as a man without — but with gradations over and above. Just look at a well-bred woman at a ball: she is well-accustomed to it; she doesn't come to it with that appearance of simple enjoyment which a shop-girl displays, who rarely gets any distraction. — They are nothings — you understand what I mean. — The absence of them doesn't make one any the less happy, but they give happiness a sort of decorum and grace."

And so she began to give him a polish and soften his uncouthness, sowing in him the seeds of refined ideas, which later were destined to blossom into wonderful flowers. He felt that he was becoming enriched and he thanked her lyrically, and when, athirst for the ideal, this woman, who had never met it in forty years, turned mystic and exclaimed: "Great darling, I believe the bond between us was woven in heaven!" he believed it too, and before her divine face kept on repeating devotedly: "*Dilecta!* You are my *dilecta!*"

But time, which destroys all things, wears out feelings, even the most sincere, and after a year of love, Honoré's admiration began to undergo a change. It must be said that growing friendships with men brought to his mind a new scale of ideas. The Balzacs had been back in Paris for a year. He had then renewed acquaintance with some young men whom he believed to have a future, for he paid no attention to the second-rate. He had become enthusiastically attached to one especially, Thomassy, who was a sensitive and shy spiritualist, and secretary to the prefect of the Cher, a frequent visitor to Paris. The soul of Thomassy was tormented by the problem of the supernatural, and by the desire

for human perfection, and he was unwearying in his efforts to dissuade Balzac from writing useless novels, pointing out to him in feverish tones the seriousness of life, and that the heart becomes fruitful only when fertilized by moral and religious ideas.

"Believe, dear friend, believe! Return to your beliefs! Cherish them! And fortify them! For they alone will guarantee you an exalted future!"

Honoré then felt that he was irresistibly going back to the glowing ideas of his fifteenth year, when he used to attend, much against his will, the boarding-school kept by M. Lepître. He unburdened himself to Mme de Berny, who chaffed him, for she was a liberal. God-daughter of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, faithful to their great memory, she was none the less filled with contempt for the parties of reaction, which by their "Jesuitry" and their little meannesses made themselves generally detested. A portion of the clergy wanted to control the University. In the Sorbonne an end was being put to the lectures being given by Guizot and Cousin. Lamennais was calling again for control by the Church as in the Middle Ages.

"How detestable they all are!" she would say. "How I loathe those people! I am going to see *Tartufe* to-night. I will wear my gloves out clapping my hands."

"I quite understand," Honoré would reply, "but liberties will be the undoing of us. Society needs a structure. There must be order, men to command, discipline, and a hierarchy. It is no question of personal tastes. One must even sacrifice them, have broader and higher views."

And surreptitiously, without putting his name to it, he published a pamphlet *On Primogeniture*. So his dear mistress was no longer all-powerful over his mind. One

single rift, and there's a discord in happiness. It is the thunder-storm of the heart, the first intimation of which is, as in the clear sky, a tiny cloud.

When the Balzac family returned to Villeparisis, Honoré rented a room, a very short distance from the Luxembourg, at the corner of the rue de Tournon and the Petit-Lion Saint-Sulpice. And as often as she could, the devoted Mme de Berny came in a carriage from her village to see him there and, as she would say, with her caressing eyes, "to give him love."

Certainly, he was still madly happy to receive her and to listen to her telling him so many attractive and agreeable things in regard to his gifts and the future which lay before him, but it hurt him that he had only a humble room, that he could not take her for rides in a carriage, or to the theatre, or spend upon her two hundred francs in a night. Yes, despite all the philosophical speculations into which Thomassy was anxious to draw him, he would have liked, if only to show his power, to give the woman he loved such childish tokens of his affection. Alas! The books which he published met with but scant success! Be it *Annette*, or *Le Criminel*, or *Le Vicaire des Ardennes*, none brought him success, success and money, without which, he kept saying to himself, lasting happiness and love are impossible. So when he saw her so beautiful and so charming, in dresses which indicated exquisite taste, and himself in a waistcoat which was much too short and a pair of nankeen trousers, it was no good his saying: "What nonsense!" He could see himself in a glass, and the sight made him miserable. She guessed the cause of his unhappiness, and it made her smile, so that one day to comfort him she brought him, from the Palais Royal, a lovely pair of white trousers with understraps.

It made him blush. For shame or pleasure? — He put them on, but not before she had begged him to do so; he went out with her; but they hadn't taken twenty steps before they met two dandies and he exclaimed in fury: "How do they contrive to have shirts so white as that?"

"My poor darling," she replied, "my fierce and wonderful Honoré, why, when you are at it, don't you have your hair curled like those young men? — How funny you would look!" And back she would bring him to his destiny: to win fame by writing fine books. "You are unique! You know so many things that one wonders where you get them! Work and work! And fear nothing: you will be the greatest man of your time!"

He believed it without very much difficulty, but nothing that he attempted ever came off; he was unable to get himself known; he stayed poor. And yet — it was true that all those of his own age seemed to him to be beneath him!

In the course of these unrestrained and childish talks, which followed the rapturous exchange of kisses at the rue de Tournon, he would mimic to his dear Laure his friends of the Café Voltaire, to which he used often to go from the Luxembourg gardens, after having turned over, under the trees, like so many, many young men, plans which were ambitious, extravagant, and foolish. Great poetry to an intoxicating accompaniment! As soon as he crossed the door of the café again, he fell back into cold prose.

"Yes," he would say, "I went again so as to see Thomassy — who must have left once more for Bourges. But I saw all the others, in their same old places, with the same old drinks in front of them: punch, coffee, and lemonade. I attempted, when I went in, to make

them understand my worth. I said: 'Stand up, gentlemen! His Excellency M. Balzac!' They didn't understand. They were discussing the 'great talent' of Delille. I said to them: 'Gentlemen, a clever fellow, nothing more!' They answered: 'Who are you to maintain that to us?' Dwarfs, pygmies, tiny brains, all they can do is to spin out endless phrases on the nature of art! Do the Sisters of Charity spend their time in speculating upon the nature of the good? They do it! All that artists have to do is to create, and it is for the *bourgeois*, or sentries mounting guard, to ponder upon whether one creates 'properly.' The incompetents! They don't even take any interest in their own time! Scientific discovery no more makes them turn a hair than the death of Cæsar! Cuvier! Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire! 'Oh,' they say with a vacant expression, 'you think we ought to follow people like that?' None of them can perceive the great work to be done. I, to be sure" (and he struck an attitude of bravado), "yes indeed, if only God grants me life, and you, wonderful woman, continue to sustain me with your love, will achieve that work, and that work will be the explanation of man by the description of his habits and his soul, as the man of science explains by laying down natural laws and classifying the animal species."

He was handsome when he spoke in that strain, with a little hollow ring in his voice, his body still thin, but coloured with the blood which coursed beneath his black hair, brushed backwards, as though the wind of genius had already blown through it.

And she would grow excited and exclaim: "It is splendid, splendid, all you have just said! And despite your coarse trousers, and your calico shirt and heavy shoes, I worship you, my Honoré! - - I can guess what you

want to do. And woman will occupy an immense place in your work. And you will be greater than Walter Scott, whose heroines, all alike, are the incarnation of duty, and no passion! Poor amateurs! What hypocrisy! We loathe it in France. (You know last night I applauded *Tartufe*.) And you might even paint a fresco depicting all our national history. It would be stupendous. A study of manners in society, as you say, and women, reign by reign!"

Then it would be he who, this time, would begin again: "It is splendid, splendid, all you have just said!"

And thereupon she would kiss him, with a thousand follies.

"You know what women are like, thanks to your beloved Laure. Perhaps you will become famous through me, who knows?"

"Above all, I shall be famous for you; do you mind?"

It was a duet of love, which as yet seemed to be untroubled, but it was not destined to last long. Too many disappointments were spoiling Honoré's life. Fame had not come, nor money. He would say with tragic emphasis: "The youth of France has no outlet any more. That youth will burst!" Then, after hunting Thomassy high and low in the Luxembourg, after waiting for him at the café, following him to the Bibliothèque, everywhere indulging his imagination, forming plans, and reflecting, after going once again to take a meal at what he called his "nursing establishment" in the rue de Tournon, at Mother Girard's, where the game was stuffed in the shop-window, and at every meal everlasting potatoes were served, mixed with chopped vegetables, he fell into despair, he who had made his début into life with a *Treatise on the Will;* he looked from afar upon the palace of the peers of France and asked himself: "Am I

not better fitted for politics?" and then began to wander round the offices of small newspapers, which he supplied with articles, already streaked with brilliant flashes, but in the editorial rooms he breathed the vile air of personal ambitions and envies, and would meet either a Roqueplan or a Rolle, who would dazzle him and cause him pain for jealousy of their flame-coloured clothes and leg-of-mutton sleeves.

Finally, it was in that time of confusion that he made the acquaintance at Versailles of a woman who, above all others, was a danger to a young man's peace of heart: Mme d'Abrantès, who had been the wife of Marshal Junot. She possessed every quality likely to upset him: her magic past even more than her present charm. What a feline temptress she was when she used to relate with shining eyes how "The Emperor kissed me upon the forehead!" Mischief was in her mind and body: at one time she would be melancholy and ailing, at another passionate and commanding; frantically rebellious, begetting passion with the appearance, all the time, of yielding to it. Honoré very well knew that Napoleon had desired her. Had he possessed her? To be sure, it would not have cost her a very great effort to circumvent and inveigle him. She liked him. He was lively, ardent, and ambitious. She said to him: "I am intoxicated when I look at you." She spoke to him about his "heavenly head." And one night he heard her utter the words, in all simplicity, which were destined to resound for several years in his ears, every time that he came up against virtue and nobility in love. "I am your friend for always, and your mistress — when you will."

When Laure de Berny learned that he was seeing her, she was seized with anxiety and inquired: "Does she look her forty years?" Then she came upon an envelope

and asked in anguish: "What can she have to write to you about?" Honoré refused to show the letters. Laure gave a start, and expressed her grief. Imagination furnished Honoré with an excellent reply. "It is she who does not allow me to," was what he said. Taking time only to recover from her emotion, Mme de Berny became, once more, all grace of mind and dignity of heart. "Very well, then," said she: "I will have regard for your youthful sense of delicacy, but it doesn't last very long — since you've got none left for me."

Why did he not answer such reproaches with a passionate protestation of his remorse? Because this short-lived adventure with another woman, who was no longer in her first youth either, had merely increased his distress. To be sure, his conscience was too clear to suffer him to dwell upon this episode, but when, once more in his room at the rue de Tournon, he had found Mme de Berny again willing to forget, generous, devoted, and high-minded, his betrayal of her was not the only reason which made him weep. Failure, poverty, and the foul intrigue with Mme d'Abantès all weighed upon his mind. He was inclined to give free rein to every sort of melancholy idea. How many of his ambitions remained unsatisfied! How many of his plans had crumbled to nothing! Above all, he couldn't refrain from thinking, without deep mortification, of all that was lacking in his love, and yet his mistress brought thereto, out of a generous heart, all the intoxicating grace of her poetic soul. But he was constantly meeting in cafés, in theatres, and in newspaper offices, or arm in arm with friends of his, women whom the first flush of the twenties, like an April sky, dispensed from the possession of all other charms. And with a laceration of mind he would confess that the most sincere and the most richly

endowed soul cannot suffice our innumerable sordid desires. The woman he loved had lost the radiant youth of body, which could not be replaced. Bitter regret, which would last as long as life! Passion which thenceforth could give only pleasures of sorrow! Did she come and exclaim to him: "You are the source of my life! My life depends on you!" vainly would he endeavour to summon up such an illusion as might permit him to utter a similar cry. And when, as she left him, after imploring him a dozen times for a more affectionate farewell, she would sigh: "I am a bother to you! I feel it! I know it! But I love you too much! Find some other woman; then I will retire. I will become your mother, with the devotion of a mother, the resignation of a mother, the love of a mother," such words pierced his heart. And yet when he first stammered out his passion he had called her mother. Adorable, adored creature — whose child he might have been! What a woe!

Love is a painful necessity, which mingles the calls of the soul and the needs of the body; all the rest is sophistry; and despite this providential encounter with a woman who had decked with flowers his most barren thoughts, the fact still remained that he had desired great love, love overwhelming and complete, in which the creature seems to attain divinity, and it had not been given him.

4

One morning he came to a weighty decision: he determined, in order to forget, to make a fortune. He felt that his mind was clear and said to himself: "Given the slightest touch of genius, a man can make a fortune by a turn of the hand. It is sufficient to have the will. Up

to the present I have desired it, but not willed it. Now I have the will for it, so I shall have it and quickly, for, after, other anxieties await me. I shall go into business in a big way. I shall not begin with mean little notions. I am energetic and in a hurry. Business needs poetry every bit as much as literature and art. It's all a question of creation: I shall create. My boldness will irresistibly attract the curiosity of the public. In two years, I shall be a wealthy man!"

"But what sort of business will it be?" Mme de Berny inquired when this peremptory scheme was broached like a roll of drums.

"I don't in the least know at the moment. There's room for creation everywhere!"

"And what about your books?"

"They will produce themselves in me, when I give up thinking of them. I shall gain time, although appearing to lose it. One must first of all live before beginning to describe life. Molière did not write his masterpieces until he was forty. His first business was to become a man. In becoming rich in a few months, as I want to do, just imagine what a harvest of observations I shall reap. I shall be storing the barns continuously, and the granaries will be crammed. And as I do not think that I shall die young — my father is old, my grandfather died at an advanced age, and they have both bequeathed to me pretty strong bones — I shall have in front of me years of plenty in which to triumph in literature as well as in business!"

He had an irresistible way of embellishing everything. She was fond of beauty and she took him at his word. The wonder is that, in a very short space of time, he put his hand upon a business, and that, in a still shorter space of time, he had won the consent of his family, who

were overjoyed that he should give up the unprofitable career of a writer. Laurence alone harboured some doubts: "I can't see you buying and selling ——"

"And why not?" he asked in a rage.

"You are too kind — too straight ——"

He shrugged his shoulders. He lacked the precious instinct of women of birth, who know that one must always be on one's guard. And he embarked upon a printing business, which seemed to him in a flourishing condition and to offer scope.

To publish Molière and La Fontaine, each in an illustrated edition, and so to make them accessible to everybody, was it not a debt to be discharged to these great men? A friend, M. d'Assonvillez, loaned him money. Mme de Berny did likewise. Six months' work, running all over Paris, journeying to Alençon, where the engraver lived. At last the books came out. For the expense of a louis, anyone could have the complete works of a great French writer! But nobody paid attention to such a handsome present. Ten copies, in all, were sold, and the fearful sum of fifteen thousand francs was lost!

Instead of indulging in recriminations and bewailing the loss of her bank-notes, Mme de Berny thought that she had discovered a remedy. There was a printing business for sale in the rue des Marais-Saint-Germain.

"Buy it," she said. "Then you'll be independent. It's dependence upon others which is killing you. They lead you on, and then everything goes wrong. You must be your own master. Then you'll be able to keep an eye on everything, you will succeed, and that disastrous loss which you have just sustained ——"

"Oh, do you think that bothers me?" he retorted, even before she had finished. "If you could only feel how strong my heart beats! Put your hand there. —

I'm full of hope. — Your advice is splendid. Once again, you will have saved me!"

And then, the printing business which was for sale was only a few yards away from the Seine, behind the Institute, in a small street, gloomy and terribly cold, where the high walls without windows were an oppression, but where inspiring memories rose up from time to time as from the grave. There Racine died; there Adrienne Lecouvreur lived. To work there, in Balzac's eyes, was to walk in the footsteps of history. As for the business, it roused him to ecstasy. To be himself a printer, after dreaming about books for twenty years! What a magnificent destiny! He would make a fortune in the service of thought.

But before beginning to bank, fresh expenditure was required to accumulate a stock. M. Balzac still kept making Honoré an allowance of fifteen hundred francs: he agreed to give him the capital sum, and it wasn't enough. Mme de Berny contributed the balance and her generosity moved him to tears.

"How she does love me!" he thought. "She isn't a woman; she's an angel. I sometimes have awful thoughts concerning her. Oh, heaven! How can I suppress them?"

She helped him again to get his certificate as a printer. It was through the intermediary of M. de Berny, Counsellor to the King's Court, "magistrate, Civil Servant, hateful man," Honoré had said, that it was secured, after three months' delay, during which he fretted and fumed and comsumed himself waiting.

At last he went into business as a soldier mounts to the attack. On the 4th of June 1827 he took possession of his printing works, with the light of the conqueror in his eyes; and yet it was not the end of a struggle. It was only the beginning of the great battle for money.

Mme de Berny

He was not alone in this race for riches. He had taken a partner. But in the articles he had caused a clause to be inserted that "*M. Balzac is solely responsible for the accounts.*" Thereupon, with his head aflame, he thrust himself into that well-built haystack, in which every bundle had its appointed place, and, in less time than it takes to tell, he had set the whole on fire.

He spent his days, thenceforward, in two small, miserably confined, and squalid rooms: an office crammed from floor to ceiling with green pasteboard boxes, and a back room, with a recess, which he had hung with a blue cotton cambric.

In the office he worked and planned, overworked and planned to excess. And he made mistakes, all owing to a combination of pride, simplicity, and imagination. As soon as the first orders came in, he grew impatient. Didn't he begin by printing a prospectus upon *Antimucous Pills for Long Life, or The Seeds of Life of Cure, chemist, 77 rue Saint-Antoine?*

"Come, come, we're wasting our time!" he began to grumble.

His partner would look at him and not understand.

His next job was a reprinting of Vigny's *Cinq-Mars*. He didn't like the book. He didn't spare the author, who went away saying: "Heavens! What a dirty creature that fellow is! — And garrulous! — Foams at the mouth too when talking — I detest that!"

Whilst Balzac would lean over his compositors and rate them: "Get done with this rotten book! Let's get on to something else! It's a ridiculous novel, in which a traitor is supported against constituted authority. Without authority a State cannot subsist."

He had theories concerning the State, but concerning printing, none: he was a creator. He had no sort of ac-

quaintance whatever with the conditions in which he ought to be working. His customers were quick to notice it. At the same time they perceived how sensitive he was and how kind. And they told one another about it. So they all flocked together like carrion crows, to exploit him as a band. It was not difficult. He had a fundamental nobility of character, which made him quite unsuitable for any kind of trade. Unable to restrain the impulses of his heart for the simple business of adding up correctly, instead of speaking curtly and having only narrow views, he made an immediate appeal to the wider feelings. Did he discover a thief? He would argue with the man before making him refund, or he would even think: "I have humiliated him: that's enough." He didn't fight with his fists, he judged with his soul, he was compassionate, he raised the discussion to a higher plane. What gibes and jeers then ensued behind his back amongst the horde of dishonest people, swarming amongst "respectable customers"! He was too intelligent, which in business is a certain misfortune. He understood the nature of vice as well as of virtue; he would scrutinize it, as doctors do a disease; he couldn't conceive anger; he was like a rapt man of science, lost in a printing laboratory. He was not a practical printer, and so he was in a hopeless situation, for he experienced greater delight in getting to the bottom of things, in learning, in broaching discussions, than in accumulating gain and enriching himself, he who had believed himself destined to get rich quickly.

Mme de Berny, who during nearly a whole year used to come to see him every day in the blue room, was not slow to grasp that he would never be a big man of business otherwise than in dreams, but as she herself was quite unfamiliar with the life of petty calculations and

underhand designs, what advice could she give him? She deemed it better therefore, and easier, to stick to her part of the woman in love. Like a fire beginning to burn low, but all the brighter on that account, all she spoke of was affection and embraces, love and passion. She was the clear light of the heart after the gloom of darkness in which Balzac was morally submerged, the victim all day long of figures: receipts and expenditure, ready reckoners and invoices.

She would say to him: "I know, you're exhausted. You are endlessly worried, endlessly disappointed, endlessly enraged. Well, don't let's talk about it now, darling; don't, if you don't mind! Be quiet! Rest; lay your head there. You used to be fond of leaning upon my shoulder. I come to make you forget. — Only let me look into your eyes. That never tires me. Dear heart! And did your strange mother conceive you on the slopes of Vesuvius, to make your eyes glow with such intensity? Your eyes burn with desire, and tenderness, and love! They are the eyes of the soul, of your soul! They are as lovely as summer. They are deeper than the heavens. I can see God in them!"

"Angel, dearest angel," he would answer, "I am quite well, I am happy, you give me back life again! I forget the workmen, the work wasted, the customers. — Ah! you can't imagine the trick that was played upon me to-day. Just listen!"

At the very moment of forgetting, a host of unpleasant recollections assailed him. Then she would place her beautiful hands across his mouth, and all the human terrors of the day would vanish and only heavenly love remain. How handsome she was in that winter of 1827–8! How he liked her in her black dress, clasped at the waist with a watered ribbon, above all in her

broad-hemmed lawn neckerchief, which she used to wear like a shawl, carelessly slipping the two ends through her belt! And he fell in love with her once more because of her years, for that abundance of warm affection which only charity can give, such charity, moreover, as can be acquired only by slow experience of the human heart. "I worship you," she never tired of saying. "I worship you, and despite your outbursts of temper, your whims, and your unmannerliness, because of your — fine soul." She would come in an ecstasy of love, on foot, from the rue d'Enfer-Saint-Michel, where she now lived in Paris, behind the charming and dignified Luxembourg. She would come down the rue de Tournon, send, in spirit, a myriad kisses towards the room in which they had loved each other throughout so many months, and down the rue de Seine, where she would buy him pastries and fruit, for now he didn't even take time for lunch, and arrive breathless, perspiring a little, overflowing with love and devotion.

"Oh, my darling," she would say, letting him kiss her, "surely we are but one substance, aren't we? — It makes me so proud, so very proud! I shall have shared with you all your bad years. Glorious years will come— and then, no doubt, you will go away with somebody else. But never will you be able to forget me, because I shall have given you happiness amidst all your sufferings, whilst the others in your happiness — will make you suffer perhaps! Oh, darling, darling, if every household was like ours, nobody would ever live singly!"

Then every evening there would be the affectionate prattle of their leave-taking. Once the workmen had gone, he would escort her as far as the street, through the workshop: "Come, my love, and we'll look at the

stone. — Lower your darling head. Be careful of the pulley. — Don't get ink spots on your dress." He would show her a new vignette, representing cupids holding up a letter. Then they had to say good-bye.

"Your mouth, puss. — Good-bye, sweet," she would murmur. "Shall I ever come back? I am so much afraid — without you I cannot breathe! Give me once more, love, that soft hand I love so much holding. — I am leaving you, sir, for twenty-four hours — as well say a century!" — (She would take his head in both her hands.) "You are great, my angel! — But I implore you, don't repeat it so often to others: only prove it to them!"

He was proving it only too well, and that was why the printing business was going adrift. A man in trade must wear a mask and never take it off. Now, this woman was helping him only to take off his mask, having, as he had, a very passion for truth. She was no more equipped than Balzac to defend herself. All that she could communicate to him were exalted ideas, and what has trade to do with them? She ruined him by loving him, and she worshipped him despite the ruins, because in the midst of all the worries from which she could not keep him, amidst so many failures, after which all that she could find to say was: "I should have acted just like you," he felt that he would owe to this good feminine genius at any rate his manhood, worthy of the name, passionately fond of all that was beautiful, and devoted to honour, all that gives value to this life.

And so, although he was beaten in the commercial struggle by merchants and customers, thanks to her his heart was growing stronger and vigorously developing like a beautiful tree; and, as it is the heart which inspires the mind with genius, he conceived radiant hopes for the wonderful day on which he would take up the

pen again, if business obstinately refused to make him rich.

Yet it seemed to him that he was neglecting nothing to attain his end. Indulging the same lyrical vein of exaltation when he was alone in his office as he used with her in his room, he believed it to be a master-stroke when he hit upon another grandiose scheme and determined to support his printing business upon a type foundry. So he would save himself heavy expenses. Then remained the question of how to buy it, how to find the money. But after that, what an advance! — His partner Barbier declined to take him at his word. He refused to go in with him, and it was she, always she, the crazy and the adorable, who got a power of attorney from her blind husband, to go into a new partnership under her own name. Fresh expenditure was incurred, and there was nothing to offset it. Panic followed, helter-skelter. The due date for a very big bill was approaching. There was not a penny in the till. He brought the books into the recess and with the help of his mistress totalled up once again sums which irretrievably doomed him. What in heaven's name was to be done? The tradespeople blandly began to present their bills. "Well, then," said Mme de Berny, "all you've got to do is to do the same to your customers. Send out your invoices."

He sighed as he ordered them to be made out: "What a way to behave! What a life to lead! I had rather that they cut my head off!"

The sending out of the invoices produced no result. On the other hand, the tradespeople became restive this time and reappeared with their accounts. To their impatience they proceeded to add threats.

"We shall be compelled to have a trust deed executed!"

"Let them go ahead!" exclaimed Mme de Berny. "Will a trust deed extinguish our love? My darling, you cannot imagine all that you mean to me!"

The following day he had to go and see the bankers. He opened his heart too much. And they were either cold as ice or mingled pity with contempt. Laure de Berny found him the same evening with the tears streaming from his eyes.

"Darling, why is God so terribly cruel to me? — You know that I have no evil designs. — I'm in a terrible predicament. — To-morrow is the 13th!"

He saw money-lenders, that savage tribe, who, with every appearance of conferring a favour, offered to keep for him fifty per cent. He went to see them with his head aflame; he returned without an idea. But after having worn himself out running hither and thither, and giving his soul to people who were devoid of any, his despair found this painful, but admirable, expression: "What a waste of time! What an expenditure of intelligence, all for nothing!"

Expenditure every moment, and always going against the grain! If he happened to meet a friend, he had perforce to keep silence or pretend that things were other than they were. And in his family circle he was constrained to lie, especially with Mme Balzac, whose temperament was so unfortunate that, even in the midst of happiness, she had a presage of misfortune. She would question him. "How are you getting along? Things aren't going at all well, are they?" And when he would answer her: "What are you afraid of?" the answer would come pat: "Everything! A man in business is secure from failure only when he has retired." At the moment he agreed with her. But there was no question of his retiring: what he had to do was to salvage such chattels

as remained to him. He drew bills again which nobody would take up. Distracted, he ran to the tables. He came back with such a tragic expression of countenance that Laure de Berny stammered out: "You have been to the Palais Royal, and you have lost!"

"Yes," he replied, "but the awful thing is not leaving behind the hundred francs I left there (the last I have, I haven't got a franc left), but the sight that I saw: in a filthy hole the faces of the damned, some thirty ferocious eyes staring at me, watching my every movement, ransacking my pockets, wondering if I wouldn't go from there and throw myself into the Seine!"

"Oh, my angel, hush!" she exclaimed; "come closer to me: I will save you!"

On her knees she offered him money: "Take it, take it all! I love you more than my life!"

They heard a rumbling in the workshop. The workmen wanted their wages. Balzac ran to see what was the matter. They covered him with abuse: "You don't care a damn, you don't, if we starve from hunger!" Such injustice and such vulgarity revolted him.

"You do not know me," said he, defying them! "Think lightly of a workman! I am ready to become one myself to-morrow. And first of all, I'll pay every penny owing, d'you hear? It's simply an accident, a delay as awful for me as for you. I haven't eaten anything either. And all I owe I will pay, I swear my solemn oath: I'll spend my life doing it; I have a conscience and a sense of honour."

In torment of this kind, which fires the blood of a man brought to bay against failure and despair, a brutal contest gives the feelings a chance of escaping, and so proves a heaven-sent benefaction, even as tears, by flooding the heart, give it relief. But that was the only

struggle of which Balzac was capable, the struggle in which a man gives himself. He was altogether ignorant of the struggle by which a man enriches himself: the struggle in which he takes. —

On the 16th of April 1828 the workmen had a writ served upon him, and the house was besieged by the creditors of the printing business, reinforced by the grocer, the shirt maker, and the bootmaker, the last with a bill for three hundred francs.

"Three hundred francs! why, that's robbery!" exclaimed Balzac.

"No, sir," said the bootmaker, chilly, "it's the sum — of what you've run up with me!"

Then he ran like a man out of his wits to his mother to intercede for him with a cousin of his, a certain M. Sedillot, a merchant.

"Let him come! Let him have a look round! Let him reckon up! Let him decide! And let them put me in prison, mother, if society insists upon it! Yes, maybe I have indeed ruined you! Yes, I do owe Mme de Berny twenty thousand francs! Yes, no doubt I am a poor creature! But if there is any divine mercy, I am sure some day of being forgiven! I have spent a year now in hell! I have had nothing but searing headaches, heartaches, and despair! Not a single day has passed but some thunderbolt has fallen upon me! All I have seen is the covetous faces of men, the recollection of which terrifies me, the eyes of men devoid of any single principle of humanity. And I have lived through awful scenes, as appalling as on a battle-field. Madmen everywhere! And nothing mattering but brute strength. Wounded? So much the better! You are quickly dispatched. The ball which hits you right in the heart was the result of a nice calculation. — O mother! mother! If you want to

assure yourself a serene old age, flee from the calculating, and avoid business people! Read the poets and mystics to distraction! They are sublime, men who have never set foot amongst the slime of life!"

"My child! My child!" wailed Mme Balzac, clasping her hands, "do not shout, I beg of you; your father will hear! He mustn't know! At his age it would kill him."

Balzac had collapsed, sobbing, upon his mother's bed. He felt as though he had been gripped by both hands and furiously spun round and round. He had fallen face foremost on the floor, exhausted; his head was reeling and everything about him.

He had sworn to become rich, very rich, rich quickly; he was poorer than ever, of every conceivable kind of poverty together.

5

The success of a man whose nature holds all the elements of success suddenly comes to depend upon a trifle, which produces an equilibrium. The man feels that it has been obtained, and he is started. Just as in the first months of his existence, when his little feet began to toddle. His mother, almost reduced to despair, keeps saying: "He will *never* learn to walk." — Then one morning he takes the floor with a fortunate stride, and the thing is done; like other men he has taken his place, squarely, on earth. Such was the case with Honoré Balzac. Once he had recovered from his bewilderment and emerged from the torture in which, thanks to the intervention of M. Sedillot, his personal honour was not doomed to founder, and whilst the business was being wound up without his clearly understanding much of what was taking place, he perceived, like a sick man re-

covering from a fever, that his heart and mind were clear. He was coming out of a night which had been a nightmare: the light of day made him feel young once more. And the unforeseen result of his misfortune was that he acquired a new zest for life.

"Seventy-five thousand francs of indebtedness," had been the conclusion of M. Sedillot.

"Very well, then. I am twenty-nine; I have good health and plenty of ambition. I shall pay. I shall pay it all off down to the last centime," was Balzac's reply.

To achieve that desirable end it was necessary to write books which could be more readily sold than the earlier ones. The earlier books were bad: experience of life had told him so distinctly. What a divine inspiration he had had when he signed them with a nom de plume! He had kept back his own name. He would now put it to a profitable and glorious use. For now he had come to realize how much society distorts the human soul, and that the moral misery produced by love or money has a pathos in the telling very different from the narration of commonplace incidents which the author can complicate as the spirit moves him. Yet he was as interested in the frame as in the picture. He could not see the dawning of the human passions which he wished to describe either in the earthly paradise or in the moon. Not even in the Middle Ages! He did not propose to do Walter Scott over again; he would continue what Scott had done by a detailed and picturesque study of the moral and material conditions determining life, but the life of his time. And what an absorbing occupation it would be!

As it was, he was already absorbed, and only his family remained deep in despair. He had just run across

a man of intelligence, a certain Latouche, the same who, ten years before, had published the poems of Chénier, and, thanks to Latouche, he had found and rented under the name of M. Surville a small flat at No. 1 rue Cassini, some thirty yards from the rue du Faubourg-Saint-Jacques, between convent roofs and the domes of the Observatory. It was almost like being in the country — silence and rest — recollection. There he would be able to work like a monk in a charterhouse. He even ordered a monk's habit. In short, he had a transport of joy and bought — without paying for them — furniture and tapestries. His mother raised her arms aloft: "Is he going mad? He's increasing his debts!"

Balzac's reply was: "I am increasing my credit! — I cannot set myself up with my table in the heart of La Bourbe [the Mire]!" (It was the muddy boulevard leading from Val-de-Grâce to La Maternité.) "Besides, only those receive payment who make others believe they have money!"

With the help of Latouche he painted the woodwork and stuck up wall-papers: and in the month of August 1828, with the assistance of this friend of intelligence and taste, he had completed the furnishing of three rooms, the walls of which were as covered with flowers as the garden upon which they opened. All that remained for him to do was to sit down and write. Suddenly he left for Fougères.

The reason for this abrupt departure was that he had decided upon the subject for his first book, and he needed documents which he could find only in Brittany. Chouannerie was fashionable. Hadn't he himself printed in the rue des Marais-Saint-Germain memoirs on the Chouan war? He had only to notice which way the wind was blowing to be seized with a desire to handle such a

subject. There was a friend of his father, General Count de Pommereul, staying at Fougères; he asked him for hospitality; he would find models in the very country-side, and the people would tell him stories which were true, the romance, the picturesqueness, and the animation of which charmed him before he had heard them. For, despite his repeated asseverations that he was prepared to describe only the society in which he lived, the study which he proposed to undertake struck him for the time being as easier, and he would portray therein real men, whose souls he would lay bare, explore to the recesses of their hearts, and, as against that, the narrative of those fearful struggles, bitter and even horrible, would add life to his description. Such was his feeling; and so he went off.

Latouche had not taken the trouble to dress him properly. He arrived at Fougères with a most extraordinary hat upon his head, rusty with age and quite shapeless, which looked as though it had been a bequest from his grandfather, the peasant of Albi. He was wearing a pair of soldier's shoes and a coarse hemp shirt; one would have said that he had grown up in his frock-coat, the sleeves were so short, and in this miserable get-up he was, literally, radiant with joy. Travelling in the stage-coach had rather repressed him; he emerged, with a great need of laughter, frisking about, and talking nonsense.

They asked him cautiously for news — concerning his business. He replied briskly: "Oh, well! it's very simple: I wanted to embark in a gigantic undertaking. That was the only condition which excited my interest. But it didn't come off; now I am turning my attention elsewhere. And what I am starting to-day will be much more tremendous! I am harnessing myself to a succes-

sion of historical novels, such as nobody in this country has ever written before."

"Haven't you read *Cinq-Mars?*" asked Mme de Pommereul.

"Oh, my dear lady," said Balzac, throwing himself back in his arm-chair, "I have printed it: I know it off by heart! It's terribly bad! There's neither a man in it nor a landscape. I know Touraine. I was born there!"

"M. de Vigny also," said General de Pommereul.

"That may be so — and more's the pity! At all events, as far as I am concerned . . ."

And he went on talking for five hours on end. The de Pommereuls had asked some neighbours in to spend the evening. He fascinated them all. To this audience of very limited experience, tightly compressed in their habits (and he realized what narrow views they must hold), he related his life of incident and enterprise, sketched twenty pictures of society in Paris, and discussed politics, the stage, the art of warfare, and the hierarchy of the Church. He felt at his ease, overflowing with eloquence, and full of ardour. Words seemed to blossom on his happy lips. They had made a circle to hear him. The men sat dumb with surprise; but the women found him most attractive, dazzling, and murmured with pleasure.

"What an advocate he would make!" said an old magistrate, in the street, under the moon.

"Yes, sir, and what intelligence, what gusto! And his forehead, did you notice his forehead?" went on an old spinster, whose legs shook with admiration on the cobble-stones of Fougères.

But he had come to be told stories, not to tell them. The following days, he held his tongue in check — as far as it was possible for him to do so — and listened.

He prowled about, went on visits, used his eyes, and asked questions. M. de Pommereul took him about in his wicker carriage. He saw in their old homes old *émigrés*, rather wizened, with little to say, old soldiers in their dotage, old ladies given to inventing things. He took in everything. Faces, gestures, the most fantastic tales — he stored them all in his "larder," as he called his marvellously accommodating memory. He would spend the morning in his room, putting his notes into order. His room opened upon the valley, which was dominated by the town and castle. With devouring eyes he made a careful survey of the landscape, trying to make out the meaning of everything, to scan the features and discover the soul of the country. And it was at that window that the idea came to him that he might perhaps write a novel concerning every district in France. What a wonderful whole! What a light thrown upon France!

The bell which summoned him to lunch always caught him day-dreaming. Nothing stimulates the appetite so much. He would go down thinking of his brilliant future and of his past, which had been so happy on the whole, thanks to Mme de Berny. Then he did justice to the good cheer and the wine of Graves which the Pommereul family drank, and which Balzac said "sparkled with ideas."

When he returned to Paris, loaded with notes and memories, he was like a bee in a hurry; he was in haste to turn out honey, and he filled his time with feverish work. Preparing to write a book, thinking over it, putting everything in order, is happiness, an intoxicating moment of ease. You embrace your subject; what joy! But when you've got to write it down, it is blacksmith's work in the smithy, blowing the fire into flame and

smiting the anvil — a task involving labour and sweat. How long it takes, too, to write a book! And how short a day is! Only a few pages are blackened after a dozen hours; Balzac calculated that two months at least would be required for his book: he decided to do it in one. The winter was so sullen and gloomy that he gave up ordering his work according to day and night. He went on writing; when he was exhausted, he would stop and sleep and eat, inquire what day of the month it was, and then remark: "The days are melting in my hands, like snow in the sunshine!" Instead of one month he spent three in finishing the *Dernier Chouan*, the first book he did the honour of putting his name to, because at every step this time, he had made his burning imagination face the cold and beautiful truth, and the result was a masterpiece and a success.

Not, to be sure, the success which he had dreamed of as a child, with bands playing and the applause of the populace, but that conviction which is sweeter and stronger and arises from interior voices, saying: "There's a book that has come off!" It's a small thing in the world, but everything is small and must be judged in relation to human weakness. The first time he saw his name upon a book, Honoré Balzac had a feeling of quiet pride. His friends approached him with faces lighted up, as though they were all the better for having read him. A splendid reward! And everywhere he felt the steady gaze of his enemies directed upon him, because they were surprised and confounded. Women began to write to him. He received invitations to luncheon in the literary world and to dinner in the political, to evening parties to hear Malibran. His mistress said to him: "It is a great page of history!" His mother admitted: "I read it at a sitting. — You should really be

La Duchesse d'Abrantès.
From a photo-engraving
of a rare print

able to sell a few copies — so as to be able to pay us back a little." His father agreed to read the book, and declared: "You speak very well about love, but — there's the other side, my boy. Think of what I have told you: 'A book on marriage! —'"

He was thinking about it. Even when he had been engaged in printing, he had written a rough outline, which had been set up; then, after re-reading it, he refused to let it be published. His father's observation reawakened this old scheme. He said to himself: "I'll go and speak to him about it. He is wonderful on women. But there's no hurry."

And the *Dernier Chouan* had been two months out when, one evening in June, an evening bland and warm and care-free, they told him, without preparation, that his father was dead. An old man of over eighty — a normal misfortune; but the grief of a son is normal as well. His was keen and was suffered in silence, although not a great deal of affection had been exchanged between them in thirty years. At the time when his father was going out of this world, Balzac felt that, instead of leaving this earth, his father, with his mocking wisdom, was coming to dwell within him. The reason is that a great sorrow, by making us reflect upon our destiny, revives in us the forces of heredity which are closest to us. So Balzac in his grief felt all the strength which his father had bequeathed to him become active, take its place, serve and assist him, and he was deceived into thinking that his father had not died. This heavy trouble followed close upon the joy of success, a joy which was real and without deception. It befell him at the time when he began to become aware of his worth and of all that he might achieve: it could not utterly cast him down. And it came to him as an additional experience. So that, for

the second time in his life, his ancestors, near and remote, came together in his conscience to aid him and to make him exclaim, as he had once before exclaimed on the banks of the Loire, when he was but a little boy, waking up to life: "I shall be a great man!" He walked behind his father's coffin, murmuring through his tears: "You might well die; with me, our name is not in danger." And when he returned home after burying his father, he sat down at his desk to write, before anything else, the book which M. Balzac had recommended on marriage.

He spent summer and autumn at it, all that time in close communion with his father's ideas. He listened and thought he heard the old man speak laughingly of women, virtue, and adultery. As soon as he had finished a chapter, he would read it to Mme de Berny. She was amused at so many truths disguised as paradoxes, and would retort upon some masculine sally with the pointed feminine observation of a woman of experience. Balzac, who didn't require to be told anything twice, would then mitigate the excessive asperity of anything that he had said. And the result of this collaboration was that a book which had been composed to make gentle fun of marriage — that is to say, the life which men share with women — made men responsible for the shortcomings of women.

The *Physiologie du mariage*, reflections upon conjugal happiness and unhappiness, appeared in December. It was an immediate success — for the second time. Either it was applauded, or it alarmed its readers, but in every drawing-room the author was spoken of, and in many they wanted to see him. Was there any reason why he should wait to be asked twice? It was not in his character. He had no suitable clothes to wear, that was true; he had just ordered a second monk's habit and he

couldn't put that on to go to visit Sophie Gay. He went as he stood, making a small concession to the spirit of pride which whispered in his ear: "Fame is what you wear; and that's the best cut of all." Unfortunately he had hobnailed shoes, which made holes in the carpet. M. Philarète-Chasles commented upon this in a corner, while the gentle Mme Desbordes-Valmore admired his eyes, and asked the hostess if there was a woman in the young man's life.

Shortly after that, he paid a visit to Mme d'Abrantès, who was taking a few days' rest at L'Abbaye-aux-Bois, and who had just written to him, after his book had appeared: "You are the Devil incarnate; you know that I have always been fond of him; it would give me very great pleasure to see you again." The visit was agreeable. He asked her about the people who, like herself, were spending quiet days at L'Abbaye, and the name of Mme Récamier cropped up in the conversation. It was one of the names which drove Balzac to reverie, preoccupied as he was with fame. That lovely woman had had such a dramatic life!

"Did you send her your *Physiologie?*" asked Mme d'Abrantès.

"No. — I shouldn't have dared to. —"

"Send it to her quickly. Come back in a week's time. We'll walk across the garden, go up to her house, and I will introduce you."

His heart gave a leap as he accepted.

"Monsieur de Chateaubriand has just arrived, I caught sight of him!" said Mme d'Abrantès when he came in, the following week. Then she burst out laughing: "What a head of hair! He hasn't even troubled to get his hair cut to see the fair Juliette! No matter — he looks like a lion!"

I

It was in March 1830, about a fortnight before the first performance of *Hernani*. She added: "*You are my lion proud and magnanimous!*"

Balzac made no reply.

"Let's be serious!" she observed. "Come along!"

Mme Récamier lived in two rooms with tiled floors, in an attic, but they were charming, like everything at L'Abbaye-aux-Bois.

"Her staircase is more difficult to climb than mine," observed Mme d'Abrantès as they arrived, "but — with her, at any rate, one is rewarded."

Still Balzac never moved a muscle.

They went in. The room was flooded with sunlight. It contained a piano, a harp, a large portrait of Mme de Staël, and there sat the great lady in a light dress with the poetry of her past and all her life investing her with eternal youth. Balzac made a very clumsy bow, but, far from taking exception to it, the first remark she made to Mme d'Abrantès was: "How kind he looks!"

"And that isn't the habit of literary men, is it, madame?" shyly observed M. de Chateaubriand, standing erect, with white gaiters, and a rose in his buttonhole.

Balzac had never seen him, either, before. He looked at him, the while he answered the questions which were being fired at him, for they had made a circle round him. M. Ballanche, who was present as well, was the first to speak of the *Physiologie du mariage*. "It is a book in defence of women," said he with unction. "I confess that I had some doubts about the sex of the author!"

"Women," replied Mme Récamier in a gentle voice, "need to be defended. What you have done there, sir, is an excellent work, and so full of wit!"

"Is it possible that you have read me, madame?" Balzac could not refrain from asking.

"I should just think so, and I must pass the book on to you, dear friend," said she, turning towards M. de Chateaubriand, who did not hear.

He kept one hand in his waistcoat like the Emperor. He was serious and absorbed; and the hair which was scattered over his forehead was in harmony with his flowing cravat.

Balzac was happy. He strode over towards the window. The garden was bare, for it was winter, but the wind swayed the beautiful, slender trees, and there came up the sound of young girls' voices. They heard him all by himself, for no apparent reason, break into laughter.

"What's the matter with him?" asked M. Ballanche in a whisper. "He is off his head, this defender of women!"

"Not at all, not at all; and he has talent, my friend, you know," said Mme Récamier to M. de Chateaubriand, who, this time, looked as though he had heard.

He even slowly replied, as though he was waking out of a dream which had transported him away to the forests of America: "Yes, but what awful blue stockings he is wearing!"

"Do be quiet! — Monsieur Balzac," she continued, "won't you come and sit beside me? Have you great literary schemes?"

"Why, yes, madame!"

"Would it be indiscreet to ——"

"Oh, no, madame — I should like to be not only a story-teller, don't you know — but — a real historian, historian of manners — and — and also a philosopher, who should lead men's minds. — Because——"

She listened to him seriously, and he found inspiration in her beautiful face, which bore the traces of so much suffering and so much nobility.

"How kind she is! How beautiful! How striking!"

he kept saying to Mme d'Abrantès with ardour, as they came away.

Then he found himself alone once more, going up towards his rue Cassini, which is on one of the hills of Paris. Fewer noxious vapours are to be inhaled there; and there is more room for poets to breathe and creative artists who feel that they have wings.

This visit to a woman who was one of the great names of French life still further revealed to him his destiny. Indeed, it was being lighted from all sides. And yet riches had not come, but, for all his debts, he did not give up hope that he might one day be rich. And yet the fanfare of fame did not blare his name to the four corners of the globe; but he felt in him strength enough to become famous. And yet he had not known the love of a woman in the pride of youth, giving her beauty and her future; but an angel had protected him, assisted and ennobled him. And yet he had not had any real youth, because twenty years without happiness —— But in this flowering time he did not regret it. It seemed to him, even, that it had merely been delayed. The number of the years doesn't matter, for we do not know when we are to die. And he thought of his father, who had gone to his everlasting rest, without weakness of any kind at an advanced age. He said to himself that if the same fate was in store for him, he would have time to achieve great works; and it was probable, for he felt himself strong.

As he was about to go into the Luxembourg, somebody driving past in a cab hailed him. It was his publisher, Gosselin.

"Oh," exclaimed Balzac, with bright eyes and a deeper colour than usual in his cheeks, "how glad I am to see you! I have just left Mme Récamier."

"Ah ha!"

"She never read a book which pleased her so much as my *Physiologie!*"

"Splendid!"

"Now, you know that I have got on the stocks for you a novel to be called *La Peau de chagrin.*"

"Is it finished, by any chance?"

"No! — but Mme Récamier — I tell you about her so that you can make any use you like of it, because you know more than I do how to make books sell and how to prepare the way — Mme Récamier made me promise that I would go and read to her *La Peau de chagrin.*"

"Dear, dear ——" Gosselin expressed his congratulations, said once more: "Very well. — Agreed. — We shall see." — And they parted.

Balzac went into the Luxembourg gardens and, under the trees which at other times had heard him indulge the fervent plans of youth, exclaimed joyously, as he twirled his cane: "It occurs to me, my worthy Honoré, that we've now got a foot in the stirrup."

II

THE TRIUMPH OF GENIUS

II

1

There is no experience, in a great city, which makes a greater effect upon the mind than encountering something such as it had given up hope of ever seeing again: some corner of its native province or a breath of country air. In a city, where the purchase of ten square yards of ground absorbs all the savings of a modest family, nothing is so affecting as an unoccupied site not put to any productive purpose. It is, at once, a defiance of greed, a respite, the fulfilment of a hope, and the soul has need of it. Where, according to the logic of an acquisitive society, should be only lofty buildings the length of a paved street, there are to be seen kitchen-gardens, a promenade, a clump of trees, a convent. Are we not really a hundred leagues away from the capital? No: it is still Paris. Such the quarter of the Observatory, where, in the spring of 1831, Balzac had been living for the last two years. He never went up towards his own rue Cassini without a flood of thoughts surging through his mind. Forsaking the crowd and all that was empty and vain, he came back to his solitude again, teeming with memories and pregnant with lessons. He came out of the Luxembourg, turning his back on the Palais des Médicis; his eye was enraptured by the sight of a dome which is also a crown, the Val-de-Grâce, and with all his heart he greeted the memory of Anne of Austria, because she had such very good taste. There where peaceful old fellows play at bowls, along a crumbling wall, fell Marshal Ney, by the bullets of soldiers, a hero for whom Balzac felt a passionate devotion. What a drama! — Here are palings, some unkept gardens, and squalors — with which to mitigate consuming pride and

luxury. A vast, unpretentious building, with high, tiled roofs: the old Port-Royal, converted into a maternity hospital, where babies are born. And on either side of the Val-de-Grâce, to right and left, convents, in which death is the subject of meditation. From his work-table Balzac could hear the bells of the nuns, and their summons was an inspiration to him to the performance of a noble work, to be the man who leads, whilst women pray. The district had all the appearance of a desert, and yet the soul found refreshment there. There was the foundling hospital, and Cochin, and the little deaf and dumb children. What a weight of human suffering! What myriad forms of vice! Shelter for suffering humanity, chapels for prayer, kitchen-gardens inspiring love for the soil, all close to the Observatory, where men marvelled at the stars; life, in a word, in very truth, for there was science engaged in research by the side of religion and its hope, and the suffering of men to be seen as well as their merit. Balzac used to say romantically: "I am midway between the Carmelites and the place where they guillotine!" and so it was: in the Place Saint-Jacques, behind the astronomers' garden, the head of a criminal would fall from time to time. This ghostly aspect was apt to please him. He had discovered in the rue Cassini a faithful retreat.

It must be said that he was in the springtime of life. Everything was to him burgeoning, breaking into blossom; he felt carried away by a torrent of ideas. The volume of them terrified him, for their very excess made it impossible for him to use them: he was overwhelmed. He would have needed two brains more to put to use all the suggestions of his own. "My head," he would say with a sigh, "ought to be like the stomach of ruminants." And his heart would beat accordingly. Every-

thing kindled the fire of his imagination: a conversation, a reading, an excursion in Paris. Not that he would ever listen to friends, who always keep telling an author: "Ah, I've got a fine scheme for you!" But he would contemplate others engaged in the business of living, and a casual word or characteristic feature would disclose to him a whole world. It was like casting the beam of a lantern into the gloom of the dullest lives. Immediately mysterious dramas and hidden beauties were revealed. Now, in inventing, nine times out of ten he was making discoveries. Moreover, his mind had *seen;* he was certain. He felt no need to wait for the exact observation of eye or ear, which depends upon luck or some act of indiscretion. The true poet possesses intuition; his mind is strong enough for its creations to be exact. He was such a poet. Houses and streets seemed to him as easily read as men's faces: from some, there emanated a beneficent grace; others were as revolting and repulsive as vice. Things suffer from the same diseases as men, have the like ulcers and the like leprosies. He would scour Paris, like a doctor; diagnose districts, and by sheer force of his imagination be better informed than a detective. That far end of Paris which used to be called the Faubourg Saint-Marceau, the streets and alleys running down from the rue Saint-Jacques to the Jardin des Plantes, especially attracted his curiosity. There, but a few steps from his door, was such destitution as seemed to conceal all manner of secrets: there, the owners of small fixed incomes were ending their lives, and students beginning theirs; in families and small clusters of families labourers tumbled over each other in filthy houses; and all that was on the skirts of the Muséum, where the animal species were classified by science. "And yet there are human species it would be useful to clas-

sify also!" was the thought running through Balzac's mind.

He returned home, one evening, in a high state of excitement. At the lower end of the rue Neuve-Saint-Geneviève he had discovered a house the sordid poverty and gloomy desolation of which seemed to constitute it, in his eyes, the very stage for a drama of which the plot was secretly taking shape in his mind. He walked round about it and was enraptured. For a whole month past he had been endeavouring to find such a degrading family boarding-house, in which a character in the most appalling moral misery might also be the victim of such material distress as would grip and shock the reader like the sight of blood on the stage. Well, he had discovered that boarding-house! There it was in front of him. The very one! What did it matter that the words *Pension de famille* were not printed up above the doorway? That was a mistake which chance had committed; he would set it right. His eyes devoured the street, the walls, and the garden. He could see his man's window, and he had already found his name: "Goriot." "This is the way he will come out — and turn to the left — to go and see his daughter Mme de Restaud. —"

"Look out, there, old man! Don't knock people over!"

It was an old-clothes vender shouting, on seeing him move back. He had stepped back a good deal, so as to see from a distance and had just walked with both feet into the gutter. He turned round upon the good woman, and began to laugh, but with more heartiness than she deserved. The reason was that his imagination, quick as lightning, had just revealed to him a new treasure; he was laughing for satisfaction and murmured: "The very woman! —"

His lodging-house keeper! The woman who kept his

boarding-house, there she stood before his eyes in the shape of this moustached gossip, and he straightway engaged her in conversation, so as to hear from the lips of the people such accents and rhythms as he would need only to continue to make his character absolutely complete. The good woman was voluble: he had a great deal more than he bargained for.

He next prowled about the neighbouring streets, as though to make out the map of their situation. The cobble-stones, the lantern brackets, such and such a shop, the appearance of such another of the inhabitants, were all stored in his memory. But he glanced at his watch, the heavy chain of which was dangling from his waistcoat: "'Pon my soul: to-night's the night that I've got my Muse, my spiritualist, and my ironmonger to supper."

He returned from that district across La Bourbe. The weather was beautiful; the mud was dry; he walked light-heartedly; and everything which he had just seen reappeared in his mind in the new shape with which his rich sensibility had already endowed it. The values had undergone a considerable change. Instead of the sun, it was the light of the mind which was now shed upon them. A dream, in a second, had passed across reality: it required only this astonishing man himself to pass. Better still, in this background of Paris which his mind had created afresh — that is to say, subjected to his desires and to his will — his characters became filled with life and moved; he began to see the necessary scenes and characteristic expressions written below them like titles. What joy it would be to start on this work as soon as he had finished what he had already in hand! It would be, in its kind, a contemporary novel, as pathetic as a tragedy of Sophocles, and in 1900 people perhaps would say

"Goriot" as they said "Œdipus" or "Antigone." This humble human being, piece of human jetsam, had to be made a symbolic figure, the representation of a human feeling developed to the point of misery and sacrifice. A father killed by his daughters, by the ingratitude of his children, to whom he has given their life and to whom he gives back his own. Of the humblest class, this father; but his daughters ladies through their beauty, by which they have risen to the higher spheres of society. The father an idiot, with the mind of a brute, but with a heart filled, to the point of death, with fatherly love; the daughters with attractive bodies and the minds of sirens, and not the shadow of a soul. Oh, if only he could begin that tremendous story on the following day! But — he had first to finish *La Peau de chagrin*. There were still another fifty pages to do. If he could finish off ten a day, he would be able to harness himself in five days to old Goriot! —

One's friends have no flair: they always drop in when one could gladly do without them! That he should have to go home and entertain, when he was living hours of unexampled clarity of mind! He thought that if he could only have taken a pen in his hand, he would have thrown upon paper, that evening, a full third of that novel — and might then have left it alone for a bit; the first gush is so very important. It is murder to stop inspiration, to thwart it and to reply: "You shall not!" when all it asks is to create, to produce, to add more humanity to God's creation.

He was just reaching rue Cassini. The bell of the Carmelite convent was ringing for the angelus. He went up to his room, opened the window, and said: "Holy women, pray to the Lord that Honoré de Balzac may have genius!"

II

It was *de* Balzac he had said, and, a few days before, he had already signed with that prefix an article in *La Mode*.

His eyes took in the twenty acres of gardens which stretched before them, away beyond the Sèvres road to the glittering dome of Les Invalides. It was the deep, rich stillness of evenings in June. The tall trees hid the low houses with their abundant foliage. The air was warm and fertile. But Balzac felt himself ever so much more abundant than that spring season! The spring was merely taking advantage of the order in which the world is arranged; whilst he possessed intelligence, intelligence and the word, which alone can give an import and a meaning to creation.

He turned round. Lying upon his table was a little copy-book in green boards, the noble colour of the laurel. In this copy-book he used to note down thoughts of the Emperor, every time that he came across one which was new to him. Placing his hand upon the copy-book, he said: "I must do in the realm of the intellect what he achieved in the world of reality: I must make order!"

He was heated as a result of his walk and all the inspiring ideas which he was agitating in his head. He took off his frock-coat, and slipped into a black monk's habit, which he tied round the waist with a bright red girdle. The indication of a dogged labour! Then he called for Rose, his servant. She appeared. She had an unintelligent face, which clearly showed that she had nothing on her conscience; she had big feet and broad hands, and they showed how used she was to hard work. He asked her: "What have you made, Rose, for supper?"

"Why," answered Rose, "what you ordered."

"And what is that, pray?" asked Balzac.

"Boiled beef."

"Boiled beef, I like that! And after?"

"A salad!"

"Dear, dear! And then?"

"Why, oysters!"

"Which you are serving first?"

"Not at all! You told me this morning, sir: 'That's to wind up'!"

"Rose, you are magnificent! Have you made any strong coffee?"

"Yes, sir."

"You will serve it at dessert, but you will prepare some more, very much stronger."

"Very well."

"Which you will not serve, which you will put upon my table, which will wait for me, and which I shall need this night, after my guests have gone."

"There's someone at the door, sir. —"

"Go and see who it is. Don't let anybody come in here; I am going down to the garden."

It was "the Muse" as he used to say. It was George Sand. He did not keep her waiting. She was abashed at the way in which he was dressed, but thought it rather striking. His neck was very white: his habit showed it off; and it was an interesting contrast, the bright flesh below a ruddy face, in which the lively blood coursed, revealing the activity of the mind above the centre of digestion. This was the third occasion on which Balzac was seeing George Sand, and he had had time to lose his temper and to recover it again. He retained sufficient of a moral advantage: he had misgivings that she would turn out to be a bluestocking, and he was on his guard. But the ivory face of the young woman, her eyes of living copper, her dilated nostrils, and sensual, red lips, in the highest degree captivated him. So that he was not

House in the Rue des Marais, now No. 17 Rue Visconti, where Balzac started as printer and publisher

displeased to be entertaining her. Moreover, he felt that she either worshipped him or envied him. She addressed him as "Master" in a bleating voice. And he thought: "Perhaps she doesn't quite believe it — and yet — and yet how else could she address me?"

So as not to lose the thread of his ideas — that was the all-important thing — he did not ask her what she had upon the stocks (she had just published *Indiana*, which he had not read and didn't want to read — had he a single moment to spare?); he went on thinking aloud of his family boarding-house in the rue Neuve-Saint-Geneviève and began to picture the boarders to himself.

She was highly pleased. She asked him: "Have you seen all those people?"

He replied: "What should you like me to say, yes or no? If I answer yes, you will think: 'He can't have much talent for invention!' If I answer no, you will say: 'He is deceiving me!'"

She answered with an enigmatical smile: "I won't ask any more questions. Please go on."

Thereupon Thomassy came in, the bashful and attractive mystic, who had been promoted from the office of the prefect of the Cher to the Seine district court, where he sat on the bench. He had always a tender affection for Balzac and would arrive saying to himself: "Heaven grant that he be alone! — He is ruining his life writing romantic novels. To-night I feel that I have arguments which will convince him to the depths of his soul."

"Hallo," exclaimed Balzac, "here comes Thomassy! Sit down there, like a good chap! I was just telling Mme Sand my latest discovery as a novelist, in a quarter I am madly in love with!"

II

And off he started again, enriching his second account with a wealth of details which had not occurred to him at first, because, no doubt, he had not sufficiently warmed to his subject. He felt them spring up in his mind so suddenly, with such felicitousness, and so naturally, that he said to himself: "I mustn't lose this excellent glow! — The creation of the mind is a mystery!" And thereafter he never stopped talking.

M. Dablin, the worthy ironmonger, who liked the society of literary folk, soon joined the group. Balzac was malicious. He thought that George Sand must be eager to meet writers, thinkers, and intellectuals! And he had fished out this old fellow, who had not grown so terribly old in ten years, since the day when he had come, in all friendship, bringing a chimney-piece to the garret in the rue Lesdiguières.

In a toneless voice, Rose announced that the boiled beef was on the table. The black monk rose. "Lady and gentlemen, to work!" In they went.

"Dear little father Dablin" said Balzac, proceeding to cut the beef, which fell into pieces of its own accord, with a knife more suitable for slitting the throat of a pig, "pray, what is your opinion of the eggs which the critics persist in laying concerning me?"

Dablin, never having read anything, had no opinion. "And you?" he stammered.

"I," said Balzac, beginning by gulping down a glass of white wine from the slopes of Saché ("Saché, Indre-et-Loire, gentlemen! I would have you know!"), "I have read only one who thought well of me, but for the wrong reasons! — Have you noticed, madame," (he was looking at George Sand and stopped, because this time it was he who noticed suddenly the powerful forehead, full of will, crowning her thoughtful eyes) "have you noticed

an article by a certain M. Hippolyte Castille? And yet it's a fine name for all that! — Thomassy, why aren't you drinking, man? Are you in mourning for Charles X? I am, too, alas, but I am trying to get drunk precisely to forget Louis Philippe! — Oh! I have hurt the feelings of Mme Sand and M. Dablin: I apologize; I brought them together because I knew that they would like one another. — Now what was I saying? — Yes, M. Castille Hippolyte has a high opinion of me, but he professes that, unlike the masters, who devoted themselves only to generalities, I, for my part, deal only with exceptions! What do you think, little father Dablin?"

The ironmonger began to stammer. "I, good heavens, I ——"

"Rose," called out Balzac, "the next course! And wine sufficient."

George Sand listened and never uttered a word; she had a sad smile.

"Madame," said Balzac, "I am boring you, I can see, by talking about the critics. Do you like creative artists better? They are not any more interesting! Ten men in a century, and not even that! The remainder are mere rubbish! All these people who publish work at random. Have they got any gifts? I see from my little father Dablin's expression that he wants to think that they have. Granted! But what do they all come to without a strong will to co-ordinate them, set them in order, and compose a whole? In order to dominate others — you are quite aware of it yourself — the first essential is to know what the others do not: where one is going!"

"And so, according to you," said Mme Sand timidly, "nobody in our time ——"

He thought: "Yes, myself!" and his eyes expressed what was in his mind.

II

"Even Victor Hugo," said Mme Sand. —

"Doesn't know where he's going!" said Balzac.

"Oh, please! —"

"Madame, is he poet, dramatist, or novelist? *Les Orientales*! *Hernani*! *Notre-Dame de Paris*!"

"Perhaps they are only various modes of expression," said Mme Sand, "of one and the same mind."

"The mind itself isn't clear!" proclaimed Balzac. "And the proof is that he can't write a book without a preface. A book ought to be written to explain something or other. Now, he begins by explaining the book!"

"So you," said Mme Sand, "will never write a preface?"

"If ever I come to write a preface," said Balzac, "I swear that I'll make every effort to suppress it the next day! It is our duty, madame, to enlighten the people. We ought to build in front of them and for them. Now look, you were asking me if there was anyone in our time —— Yes, there is a great poet!"

"Musset!" exclaimed M. Dablin.

"Lamartine!" exclaimed Thomassy.

"Cuvier, my friends!" said Balzac vigorously. "The only one! The giant of them all! With a few bleached bones he has repopulated whole worlds, he has recreated the life of some thousands of centuries! If you are in difficulties to know what great name to drink to, I can always offer you the name of Cuvier!"

He raised his glass. His eyes were sparkling. His cheeks were aflame. But his forehead remained splendidly white, as though it conceived only Olympian ideas and neglected any others.

Three bottles had been emptied. He pointed to them: "We are not drinking!"

After they had consumed six dozen oysters, he pointed

to the shells: "What's wrong with you all to-night? Does nobody feel hungry?"

He ordered a second salad to be dressed. After the oysters he called for soup.

"What!" said he, "there's no more Saché? Rose, send M. de Margonne twelve carrier-pigeons on the spot! Twelve will be sufficient to bring back four bottles. Sixty leagues, we shall have them at day-break! Meanwhile, we'll take a breath of air and chat under the moon!"

What he described as chatting was merely to continue his monologue. They went down and sat under the clematis and flowering honeysuckle, which exhaled a sugared perfume. Thomassy was pensive.

"My poor Thomassy," observed Balzac, "I quite understand that you cannot be happy under a government which has no plans, no energy, and no ideas! But let me go my own way. If you only knew what's in store for your servant at Cambrai and Angoulême ——"

"Would you contemplate standing?" inquired Thomassy.

"I am standing with a program of order and strength," Balzac replied. "What Napoleon achieved with his fist, and Louis XVIII by craft, the one on horseback and the other in a carriage, that's what's got to be done over again! The people are waiting for a leader!"

"Then," said Mme Sand gently, "you — you contemplate going in for politics? And you — propose to abandon literature?"

"Literature!" said Balzac, blowing hard, shrugging his shoulders, and opening his habit at the neck, "but, my dear lady, literature doesn't exist! There is life, of which politics and art are part. And I am a man that's

alive, that's all — a man living his life — nothing more!"

"Yes, but the plan, the well-defined plan ——"

"Oh ho! but it is well defined, upon my soul!" retorted Balzac, laughing with mouth, lungs, and belly; "it is indeed, and as clear as the moon to-night! See how lovely the moon is, how queenly, how imposing — all gold! The moon is looking upon us with eyes of love, brooding upon M. Dablin! The moon covers him over, gilds him! — and me too, word of honour! Is it a sign of wealth? — It wouldn't surprise me in the least — I have in my head two or three subjects for books, intended for an enormous public.— "

"What you were telling me about the rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève?" asked Mme Sand.

"Not at all! Something entirely different! I want to write a book to be called *La Bataille*. It will be terrific! A summary of all the wars that have ever been! It will begin with the roar of cannon. There will be the smell of powder in the very first line and it will continue until the last, with the shout of victory! The reader will be as engrossed in the fight as the soldier, but, whereas the soldier fights and sees nothing at all, the reader will see everything. The book will contain everything — the struggle, the waste of blood, dead, wounded, generals, heroes, cowards, comedy in the heart of drama, the smallest detail, a general view, and, surmounting all, Napoleon, with his hat, on the skyline, against a dazzling sun!"

"If done by you, it could be marvellous!" said Thomassy.

"I think so," replied Balzac. "I feel myself just ripe. I have more ideas than I can hold. Words come to me faster than I can write them down. Now I am able to see

and I can guess. — Ah, and then I shall write a sequel to *La Bataille*, about a man who is believed to be dead, whose wife marries again, who comes back and is disowned by everybody! My children, we have lived, we are still living an unheard-of epoch! Why, it is even the finest that has ever been! Thomassy, don't deny it! In spite of the Government, which is worth no more than an old dish-cloth, everything is simply splendid! We are at a cross-road. There is danger imminent! But how picturesque it is, how absorbing the struggle! What work I have in front of me! Unfortunately, I cannot cope with it all, the days are so absurdly short. And we've got to sleep! Why have we got to sleep? Science owes it to itself to discover forthwith a means of resting men like me in a quarter of an hour!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed M. Dablin with a sigh, "he wants to do us out of our nights and our beds! Oh! my nights, my bed!"

"Not at all, not at all, you can keep them," said Balzac, "but, as far as I am concerned, I am like the moon and the stars: I can't prevent myself from giving light. — Unfortunately that doesn't prevent me from becoming thirsty. Upon my soul, we've eaten no fruit! In the month of June, isn't that absurd? Rose, my child, some fruit! You haven't got any? Go and buy some! The shops are shut? Run and pluck some! Where? In the orchards of Mount Parnassus! And if you find a Muse while you're about it, you shall bring her to Mme Sand, who likes the staff of literature. Now, then, off with you! — Dear little father Dablin, have you read in *La Silhouette* my article *On a Pair of Goatskin Trousers?* They would swear that I had seen the pair you are wearing to-night. Madame Sand, how long did it take you to learn French? It took me seven years! It's a sub-

ject which remains very little known in France. Look at M. de Lamartine: a delightful troubadour! But he doesn't know his own tongue. Lord! how difficult it is to write! I have written seven novels simply in order to learn my trade. One for practice in dialogue; another to learn how to describe things; a third to group together my characters; a fourth so that everything should be in its proper place, and so on, and so on! And if I am what I am — and above all what I am going to be, I shall owe it solely to myself and to my will! A man must be great or not be at all. When you see the mass of ordinary mortals, you wonder why they exist, with what object, and what interest they take in living."

"La Touche made exactly the same observation in my hearing!" M. Dablin ventured to remark.

"That's very extraordinary," said Balzac; "he must have been very ill, for in his normal condition he never says anything very sensible!"

"You — are no longer friends, then?" said M. Dablin, all confused.

"We have no longer that honour!" replied Balzac with sovereign dignity, "and I needn't tell you that I don't care *that* whether we are or not!" (He snapped his fingers.) "I haven't time to worry about petty details of that sort." (He had undone his red girdle.) "He has nothing whatever to do. All his life long he has been busy with trifles. *I* have a great work!" (He stretched out both arms against the back of his bench.) "That young woman, Rose, won't bring us back any fruit! An honest, stupid girl! And there's no wine left. — Will you have some more oysters? Or some coffee, some very strong coffee, strong enough to blow the tops off skulls inhabited only by peaceful ideas? It's outrageous that one should be unable to get fruit at night in a big city.

I'll refer the matter to the justice of the peace. Ah! There again is a marvellous theme: *Le Juge de paix!* I have been thinking about it for a long time: the district judge, unassuming and in quite a humble station, whom a rich man could never succeed in corrupting either by dinners or by intimidation. And I should depict him in a case of no importance displaying the most exalted virtues!"

"Yes, indeed — with a pen like yours," said Thomassy, "that could be an important book."

"For the people too!" said Balzac, "for the genuine thinker, the genuine philosopher, — and he only is fit to write — addresses himself to the common people. —"

"Heavens! It's ten to twelve," exclaimed George Sand, looking at her watch by the light of the moon; "I shall miss my bus at the Odéon."

"Ten minutes to twelve! You shall not miss it!" (He girdled himself again.) "Rose, the silver candlesticks! — Madame, I am honoured to have entertained you in my house and to have discussed with you what constitutes the true greatness of a human destiny. We are agreed upon the conclusion of our argument, are we not? A great task, to feel that God is behind one, and to place oneself entirely in His hands. — Go ahead, if you please; I will light the way."

"You can't go out into the street in that get-up!" blurted out the ironmonger.

"Yes, my little father Dablin! My habit is the colour of night, with a sunset glow round my girdle. Come along! I will go with you as far as La Bourbe!"

And, holding a candlestick in each hand, he went on talking as he walked in front of them. They had given up listening. George Sand walked between the two men, whispering in a thin voice: "I know the story of La Touche. It isn't Balzac who is right. — As La Touche

said to him: 'You may be the inventor of the physiological novel; earth, sea, and sky may have waited for you to describe them — I grant you all that! but I should like it all the better, for your sake, if you were a good fellow!'"

"Oh, as for that, madame," said Thomassy, "that's not fair; if you only knew him well! —"

"He's bursting with pride!" said Mme Sand.

"The nobility perished in '89," said Balzac in a loud voice, turning round; "but, as far as privilege is concerned, there still remains the nobility of personal desert! —"

He strode forward vigorously some twenty yards.

"For my part, I believe in him," said the ironmonger, "in his energy, and in his future!"

Balzac half turned round again.

"Madame Sand, if you do miss the bus, take advantage of this moonlit night, go down as far as the Pont Royal and, under one of the arches, on the bank, wait for dawn: it's Fairyland!"

When they came to La Bourbe, he said: "Farewell to you all, fortunate folk, who have the good luck of M. de Balzac's acquaintance.— Don't laugh, my little father Dablin. Ironmongery won't be worth a farthing if some day or other I don't describe an ironmonger! Safe journey home! God be with you! I am going to work."

He went back home, under the trees, in a hurry. The candles had run all over his habit. He took it off and threw it into a corner, remarking: "Monsieur Brisson, tailor, you shall be requested to remove the grease!" Then he put on another one, which was white with a black girdle. He drank a big cup of coffee and called: "Rose! it isn't strong enough! It is never strong enough! — Rose! — She has gone to bed, always in bed! — Al-

ways sleeping! The human race cannot make any progress; it is always the same people who do everything! I have ten articles commissioned for this week! — And I must go to Delphine Gay's marriage at Saint-Roch's. — Still another day lost! — I shall have to take a cab. — But I will take one. Next month I shall earn enormous sums. And in six months I shall perhaps be able to pay off the greater part of my debts — especially if I do *La Bataille* and *Le Juge de paix*. As for old Goriot, I think I had better wait. It is so stupendous! It will be a caryatid in my work!"

He poured himself out a second cup of coffee. "No taste! I shall have to buy it and make it myself."

He placed a candlestick against a statuette of Napoleon which he had on his mantelpiece and gazed at the figure as though he were inviting a glance from it, as though he were comparing himself with the subject of it, and said: "What a man! There was nothing that he did not do, and yet they represent him with his arms folded!"

Then he sat down at his desk, where he wrote two hurried lines on a strip of white pasteboard, which he thrust in between the imperial cloak and the hilt of the sword. And he laughed with all his heart, with the laughter of victory.

He had written upon the piece of pasteboard: *"What he began with the sword I shall finish with the pen!"*

2

In this triumphant state of mind he was not in the least surprised to discover, one September day, a letter at his publisher Gosselin's waiting for him, a letter from a great lady, expressing her admiration. The letter was

unsigned, but paper, writing, and terms of expression, all indicated a noble source. He thought to himself: "That's just as it ought to be — and nothing strange about it. That's what ought to happen. In the first place, I deserve it, and in the second place, if Providence has any designs upon me, I must set my foot in the drawing-rooms of the Faubourg Saint-Germain."

Then, as he was not without some self-conceit, and a solitary, uncommunicated happiness was foreign to his notion of things, he spoke about the letter to his guardian angel, Mme de Berny.

"Oh, oh!" said she, "let me see!"

"I do not carry it about with me," was Balzac's reply.

"Or else you are keeping it back from me," said Mme de Berny sighing. "Darling, please don't do that!" (She implored him with an expression of pain upon her face.) "Don't forget all that you owe my poor heart! — Why, O heaven, was it not God's will for us to live together — far removed from the world? My love would have been sufficient for you and you would not even have opened the *billets-doux* of these ladies with nothing better to do. —"

"Why with nothing better to do?" inquired Balzac. "Because they read my books?"

"Because they write to you! Oh, dear friend of my life, I should love to see what those women look like!"

"So in your downrightness or your jealousy ——"

"In my love! Let the right word be enough for you."

"So you don't admit that there might be one good one amongst the lot?"

"Did I write to you, I? — Believe me, sweetheart, and listen to your heart and not to your self-conceit. Your heart is ever so much greater when you like, and

in speaking to you as I do, it isn't even our love that I am protecting. I can see beyond. I am thinking of your talent. They will ruin it for you, my darling. They all want to attach a celebrated man to themselves. If you are really fond of fame, be careful of a feminine halo!"

When he had gone, tears filled her eyes as she looked at herself in the mirror. "I cannot have the future: I am only an old, weak thing. — But I have had all his heart, and nobody can rob me of my past!"

And as he went back by rue Cassini, Balzac thought: "She doesn't remember that yesterday she had everything. She wants to-morrow as well; that is excessive!"

And once more: "She talks of my talent! — But I need to enrich it! She mustn't dramatically transform a simple artistic necessity into a betrayal."

One sophism upon another. The result of stating poor excuses and hearing his conscience, on each occasion, reply: "Are you quite certain?" was that he left the unknown lady's letter unanswered for several weeks. After which, no longer clearly remembering that there might be something wrong in what he was doing, he wrote: "Madame, tell me your name I implore you!" The lady did not require to be asked twice; she replied: "*Marquise de Castries, rue du Bac.*"

Balzac was dazzled.

"I had guessed aright! — That's what she calls a woman up to nothing at all! — The best course is not to tell her another word about this episode — which will make me advance some considerable strides in Paris society. Poor dear! And yet, she has every noble quality of the heart and had in her husband's right a *de* prefixed to her name, already more than a hundred and fifty years old, but she does not perceive the social importance of that old, old nobility, enclosed with such dig-

nity in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Where she is right is — that I must go carefully. My situation compels me to. A great lady admires my work and sends me her address. It is not a reason for running off to see her. I must wait for her to say: "Well, then, what are you waiting for?"

He had strength enough so to do, and it was only on the 28th of February 1832 that he went by invitation to the mansion in the rue du Bac. But this time he was consumed with a desire to see her. He had interrogated twenty people concerning her. He knew that she was a great lady, that she lived apart from her husband, that she was strikingly beautiful, and that she had known love outside the bonds of matrimony, with Prince Victor de Metternich, by whom she had even had a child. Less than that was enough to fire the imagination of Balzac.

On the 28th, at three o'clock in the afternoon, he was fuming and fretting: he had hired a coach and it hadn't come. They handed him a letter. It was not to countermand his invitation: it bore a Polish stamp. Really! Had he a woman admirer so far away as that? Yes indeed! The letter came from a woman, from a woman who had read his books, and read them thoroughly, who was enthusiastic about his first books, and signed herself *l'Étrangère*. The handwriting was neat, delicate, not overbold, rather like a schoolmistress's, but the style was charming, moving, and lyrical: it had soul and was undeniably sincere. Balzac smiled to himself. "Why, now — all Europe's getting busy! I must tell them about this in the rue du Bac: it won't do any harm. —"

"Sir, the carriage is waiting."

"At last!"

One last glance over his attire: he was wearing a new frock-coat of Louviers green, and a cashmere waistcoat.

And he said: "Coachman, gallop, my friend, you're late!"

Hardly had they crossed La Bourbe when Balzac was at the carriage door: "These horses aren't going at all! They're moribund."

Then, lying back on the seat: "It would be a masterstroke, a union between the Faubourg Saint-Germain and Honoré de Balzac! Two forces which need one another. — The former especially; they must take care and model themselves upon the English lords. They have the secret, like nobody else in the world, of assimilating wealth and pruning their old aristocratic trunks!"

The coach stopped.

"Ah," he exclaimed, well pleased, "here we are at last! Very good going!"

He gave a good tip as he said: "What a district! The silence! — The solitude! — It makes a man feel that this aristocracy is the brain and the intelligence!"

Then he went in under the archway of the mansion, murmuring to himself: "Now it's between us two!"

But as he was entering the court-yard, a bell rang and the door above the steps opened wide. Two footmen removed his coat with such haste that they made him lose his boldness. He thought that one of them had motioned to him; he pushed a door open and discovered a closet full of brooms. He grunted, looked enraged, and one of the footmen pointed him out the staircase. There were pictures hanging all along the wall, but he didn't notice what they represented. After passing through an enormous library he was brought into the boudoir of the Marquise, who was lying stretched upon a divan, dressed in a *peignoir* of brown cashmere. He saw at the first glance that her hair was very fair, surmounting a little doll's face. He bowed.

II

She said: "I am very pleased to meet you, Monsieur de Balzac. Alas! You've come on one of my bad days. You find me unwell."

Sitting on an easy-chair beside her was a gentleman with whiskers, dressed all in black.

Balzac said: "Madame, don't see a doctor: you'll soon get better!"

"Doctor," said the Marquise to the gentleman in black, "do you hear what he says?"

"Ah, madame," stammered Balzac, "it is — a harmless pleasantry. —"

Decidedly he was dropping bricks! The blood flew to his cheeks.

The gentleman stood up and said: "Marquise, my respects. Until to-morrow!"

And without so much as glancing at Balzac he withdrew.

While the Marquise took a few steps with him to the door, Balzac let his eyes wander all over the room and was delighted. On the tables were the myriad dainty little knick-knacks beloved of a fashionable woman, such as cut-glass bottles, fans, and snuff-boxes; there were also rare pieces of furniture of the eighteenth century; a carpet which was as deliciously soft to the tread as it was a joy to the eyes, and over all, that supreme ease of well-being which is the distinguishing feature of aristocratic habits, developed by the long possession of inherited riches.

The Marquise came back and sat down. "We shall be able to have a quiet talk together."

He then perceived the finely pencilled features and the light pink complexion of what he had called a doll's head. What a lovely little forehead! All it wanted was a crown. — Was she really a blonde? No, she was rather

Balzac's lodgings, No. 1
Rue Cassini

inclined to be red-haired, with very vivid patches. She had a little round chin and a dimple, a guileless mouth, and inquisitive eyes, eyes which gave Balzac back his self-assurance, when she said: "I was in despair of seeing you."

He replied with the accents of perfect truth: "Madame, I live a life of unremitting toil. Work is everything to me. I never go out."

"Come, come, Monsieur de Balzac," she exclaimed, "do not exaggerate! A fortnight ago you were at Baron Gérard's."

"Only to see the Davids, madame!"

"And on Tuesday last at my friend the Marquise de la Bourdonnaye's."

"Madame, I stopped only an hour."

"Oh, I am not blaming you but — I'm jealous." She said these words with a certain chilly intonation.

He said to himself: "Masterful woman!"

"Is your Pauline," she went on, "in *La Peau de chagrin* modelled upon somebody in real life?"

"Ah," thought he, "now I've got her; now I'll test her."

And, like a consummate actor, he lowered his eyes.

"Madame, Pauline exists and she is even more beautiful! — If I have wrapt her in an air of mystery, it was to admit nobody into my secret!"

The Marquise had her past: he wanted to indicate to her immediately that he had his as well; and he thought that she was out of countenance, but it was he who was jealous.

She pretended a high esteem for all Balzac's books, "even that *Physiologie du mariage*, which some people ——"

"Oh, madame," said Balzac, "when I wrote that, I

suffered the fate of outposts. I was peppered with bullets. But I am one of the wounded who take pleasure in their wounds, if you are going to nurse me! How kind of you to ask me to come! I have so few genuine supporters. Where are the true friends of us artists? Hidden! Lost! We never make their acquaintance. How should I, especially, get to know them?" And he began again on the subject of his appalling labour: "I go to bed at six, just when you are beginning to scintillate at balls, to live for poetry: then I harness myself to my prose! — All this time I have had to make efforts not to come and see you. I wanted to be free of certain work I had in hand. When I am hard at my task, I no longer dwell in this world; I am bent back upon myself; I look into my own brain; I am not fit for society!"

She seemed to be listening to him with sufficient interest. He had begun to speak, and he never stopped, so that after some time had elapsed, he waxed enthusiastic about her.

As five o'clock struck on a little timepiece above her couch, she rose up. "You will forgive me — I have to go out. But I have been delighted with your visit. Remember that you will always find me at home in the evening, until ten o'clock."

He went away in an ecstasy. In the rue du Bac, up which he walked towards the Sèvres road, he said to himself: "I shall love her! I am going to love her! I do love her! At last, here's a beautiful woman, who produces the intoxicating sensation of battle. That's just what it is, the intoxication of life and love! Already I desire her; before to-morrow I shall want her! — No doubt I have known an angel in my life, a woman who was true; but this is a true woman! She is neither a mother nor a friend, but a mistress!" He walked so fast that

the sweat was pouring off him. "I'm becoming stout; how awful!" He hailed a cab; and, sinking deep down into the cushions, instead of giving the coachman his address, he dumbfounded the man by telling him: "One must have a very beautiful mistress, capable of bearing any kind of comparison. All the rest in love is madness!"

Two days later, at ten o'clock in the evening, he presented himself again at her house. He had bought a magnificent hat lined with sky-blue, so as to keep it, as the fashion was, on his knees and show the lining, and he came in a carriage which he had hired and which had been ordered to wait in front of the steps of the mansion.

The Marquise was dressed to go to the ball — a dream of loveliness. She was standing in front of her fire-place, warming her feet, the feet of a goddess. So it was that he described them aloud. And he went on with the conceit, saying: "Why should a man be surprised, for you are worthy to consort with the gods? — Alas, I am only a man!"

She gave a delicious smile. "In your quality of man I find you very passable. Are you aware that I have a beautiful friend who is in love with you?"

"What joy!" he exclaimed in a resounding voice. "Tell me her name, quickly."

"Oh, really! Never!"

She was adorably arch. Balzac's heart began to leap, and a voice within his breast to mutter: "What a misery not to be able to tell such a woman right off that one loves her, that one worships her, that one would like to live with her for ever! That's how life would be both beautiful and good!"

He perceived immediately that she was in love, if not with him, at any rate with his growing renown, and like so many women who kept a *salon* in Paris, she wanted

him for herself, that dear Marquise, and not for her women friends. He was at once so amused and so flattered that he did not hesitate to employ the most obvious devices.

She had just been reading in a review an article upon him, which was nothing more than an advertisement.

"Have you read it?" she asked.

"Not at all, madame!"

"Then listen to what it says: 'Balzac's novels are bringing sleepless nights to the mansions of the rich and the attics of the poets; they are the delight of the country; in winter they give a livelier reflection to the spluttering of the faggots. Rare privilege of the story-teller! . . .' Not bad, is it?"

He bowed. "Not at all! It's very nice. —"

He had written the article himself.

"Ah!" she went on with animation, "the ladies who think such a lot of you would be nicely caught if I were to carry you off in the spring to a palace in Venice, if we were to shut ourselves up there, we two, and if you were to work only for me!"

Venice! A palace! They two! He was dazed at what he heard. What was she talking about? Was it merely vanity? Love? Was she dreaming? Or on the other hand ——

Without replying he threw himself upon her scarf and kissed it madly.

She said quickly: "Good heavens! Midnight! I am terribly late! Do you like this little timepiece? It used to belong to Marie-Antoinette. At Versailles it counted for her her last hours of happiness!"

"Heavens!" exclaimed Balzac, "and all that it tells me is the grievous time that I must leave you."

What a night he spent! And thereafter what days!

II

He had now love in his heart and love in his head. And when he returned, before even greeting her, without any preliminaries, he exclaimed: "I worship you! I can't go on living without you! Never have I known before what love is! It is you who are teaching me the meaning of love! You are divine!"

She looked at him in bewilderment, stepped back, and fanned herself. She rang for a servant to give the first order that came into her head, to cause a diversion — then, in her shrill, emotionless voice, she said to the man who had just given vent, with all the recklessness of a madman, to the storm which was raging in his heart: "Well, now! That's an astounding piece of news! Who would ever have guessed that?"

But she saw in his eyes, like an eagle's, that it would be difficult to simper, and with the extraordinary talent which she possessed for social conversation, in which so many snares are set under the appearance of harmless commonplaces, she was successful in abruptly drawing him off, as one does with a child in a temper or an angry animal.

"Since you are already so devoted to me," she said with a kind and sincere smile (the wiles of this woman wore the aspect of sincerity), "would you agree, to please me ——"

He answered quickly: "Yes, madame, anything!"

"Don't be in such a hurry! — to write in *Le Rénovateur* — which is managed by one of my dearest friends — an article in favour of the Duchess de Berry?"

The eagle did not hesitate: "I am yours to command!"

Le Rénovateur was a legitimist sheet. To write in it was energetically to take sides: and of a writer who aspires to derive universal fame from a work of high im-

partial observation an act of considerable renunciation is required to determine him to a course which, for the remainder of his life, will always be brought up against him by a whole section of his readers. But Balzac was crazed; he was flying on the summits and could no longer descry the meannesses of the earth below. The alliance which he contemplated with the Faubourg Saint-Germain was being actually proposed to him by her. He stretched out both hands. "Thank you for having thought of me!"

And sailing along upon the clouds of illusion, he declared that the abominable government of Louis-Philippe was doomed! He would be the prophet intimating its downfall: an absurd government of national guards! When the king had come to the Hôtel de Ville to take the lieutenancy-general, had he not declared: "I am an old national guard paying a visit to his former general, M. de Lafayette"? The poor wretch! One didn't even venture to dub him "Usurper," for the means which he employed were so contemptible! The legitimist party was the only party worth anything and with any future before it; Bonapartists were all dead and republicans not yet born! It had even the good fortune of not being popular. Alleluia! For it was essential, with all speed, to turn the tide of the miserable popular doctrines of 1793. Equality, what a chimera! So, in the end, it was agreed: Honoré de Balzac would contribute a fervid article to *Le Rénovateur* and reply to the critics — for it was only to be expected that there would be a swarm of these fleas of journalism which pollute the finest things — reply that from then onwards he paid attention only to the judgment of a certain set in society!

Whilst talking in that strain, he admired the exquisite

taste which reigned in that mansion, in which he was received, entreated, and admired, and, feeling happy, he said again: "A writer like me, who has had only the highest ambitions, writes, when all is said and done, for some twenty-five people at most! So there will be no change in my life."

He gazed at her. She was bewitching. What dignity! What blood! And what luck for him to become associated with such magnificence! Yes, indeed, there was the head and front of the State!

He went back home, not only reeling with the force of his passion alone, but exalted with the importance of the part which he was about to play. Now his work had acquired an orientation and fresh energy! A note from Mme de Berny was waiting for him at home. *La Dilecta* was at her country house, La Bouleaunière, near Nemours, and she wrote: "Come, my beloved, and see me. You will be very comfortable, beside your dear little puss, to write to your heart's content! Far from being in your way, I will help you and be an inspiration to you. Love is a great creator!"

He replied: "My poor darling, if only I could! But I am in the midst of arranging a publishing matter which perhaps will entirely change my life. I must be on the spot. And I must continue writing, always! Ten pages a day! Now I work at night. Good-bye, love! Think of me when you go off to sleep. It's the hour when all men rest. I, on the contrary, sit down to work!"

It was only half a lie: he had an enormous deal to do, for he wanted forthwith to harmonize his outside life with his plans for thinking and writing. Inasmuch as he was becoming the spokesman of a political party, it was essential that people should understand the opinions he held at the sight of him; it was essential that clothes,

linen, household, and course of life, should all be legitimist!

"A man can't be the lover of the Marquise de Castries and leave her to return home like Job to his dunghill!" So he would forcibly argue with himself in his room in the rue Cassini.

He began with his tailor, his beloved Buisson in the rue Richelieu. With him life was easy. The bill grew bigger and bigger, but Balzac never paid. Buisson was a simple-minded, charming man, keenly sensitive to eloquence, ideas, and rhythm: he could not withstand his customer's flow of talk; in giving an order, Balzac displayed such promising impetuosity and generosity as quite carried the tailor away and, as far as he was concerned, was worth its weight a hundred times in money.

"A violet overcoat? To be sure, Monsieur de Balzac! You shall have it in a week's time. . . . Four waistcoats? Five waistcoats? Three in cashmere, two in piqué. I quite understand! . . . One pair of flannel trousers, English flannel, and red, for working in? I'll put them in hand forthwith. Two other pairs, in cloth, for visiting? Here, sir, is the finest cloth I've got! Still another frock-coat? In blue cloth with a violet stripe? Ah, that would be beautiful! But for that I am obliged to charge a hundred and thirty instead of a hundred and twenty francs. . . . "

There was no meanness about M. de Balzac. Never an observation from him about the price. The heart was as big as the brain. Buisson began to wonder if his own affection for the man did not outweigh his admiration.

When he came out of Buisson's, off he went to buy some fine linen, some open-work silk stockings, gloves the colour of fresh butter, a beaver felt hat; next, a

livery for his coachman, for he had mounted his own coachman upon a hired coupé, and his coachman was more imposing than the English Ambassador's! Only the coupé cost him very dear and earned him the sarcastic comments of his friend Sophie Gay. — He then resolved to buy a tilbury and a cab with his crest upon them, and a pair of English horses. He went to a dealer who had been recommended to him by a friend. He made a show of examining the beasts as an expert, felt their tails, raised their legs, looked at their teeth. Then he inquired: "Are they mettled? Yes? And when they gallop — well — do they foam?"

The dealer smothered a laugh.

"Why this merriment?" thundered Balzac in a rage. "I want a pair of high-stepping horses. I am not buying heavy draughts!"

"Ah, he is the heavy draught!" was the dealer's comment when he went out.

These horses were destined to be a torture to him. They ate a great deal.

"The scoundrels," he used to say, when he received the accounts of Rouard, fodder merchant, rue Saint-Jacques. "They don't live on lyrics!"

But he didn't pay Rouard any more than he paid Buisson, convinced as he was that he would pay them both quickly. Hadn't he splendid contracts with his publishers? And he had to set to work, to work with fury; he proposed to immerse himself in work, whence he would emerge, his hands full of masterpieces! His creditors might sleep peacefully in their beds o' nights. To be sure, he was in the habit of giving magnificent receptions, he went to the Opéra, to the Théâtre des Italiens, to fashionable restaurants, to the Champs Élysées, to *salons*, and to balls.

II

"The fact is," he used to say to himself, "God has made man in His own image. And some return should be made to God from time to time, by being like Him everywhere! I want to *represent* a party; I must first present myself — that's the proper course — and people must see me! If we had a king, we should see him, but we haven't a king; that being the case, people must see the man who is pleading for the true throne!"

Of royal disposition himself, he made every detail of his life fit into the exalted duties of his office. He was impressed by all the refinements he saw in the mansion of the Marquise de Castries, and now he felt it necessary himself to have flowers in his room at the rue Cassini, "because," said he, "the body is wedded to the mind, and I have no more right to breathe like a boor than I have the right to think like a national guard!"

He thought, breathed, wrote, and behaved like an infatuated and frenzied lover. He began to see the Marquise the whole afternoon. At night, in the theatre, he sat by her side in the first row of her box. Then he would escort her back to her mansion. In her carriage he would take hold of her hands and her arms, he would clasp her knees, and, panting and near to swooning, she would suffer him, when, all of a sudden, at the corner of the rue de Varenne and the rue du Bac, she would recover possession of all her faculties, set her hair again in position with the back of her hand, and, composed in front of her servants, bid a "Good-night, Monsieur de Balzac" from the steps, which nearly choked the poor lover.

With tottering steps he disappeared into the night.

What was this woman? An angel, or a monster? Why did she allow herself to be kissed so madly? Why did she whisper such words of passion? Why did she risk every form of imprudence and abandonment — save one?

II

What was it that she wanted? What else was she waiting for than what he was distractedly clamouring for? If she didn't love him, how did she come to give him her hands, and face and lips and, still more, her eyes, her stammered phrases? Why did she surrender herself? For she did surrender herself! No! She was always able to draw back! Was this withdrawal, then, her supreme delight? In that case, she was the spirit of pride incarnate in a woman. And he would crush himself, exhaust himself, and perish in consequence!

One day that he arrived burning with passion and brutal, prepared for anything, having left her at two o'clock in the morning after wearying embraces and endless endearments, he found her in earnest conversation with her confessor, an ecclesiastic to whom she introduced him, saying: "Monsieur de Balzac, we were waiting for you, His Lordship and I, to hear you on how necessary it is to restore to religion its ancient splendour. Does not France owe it to itself once again to establish the Bench of Bishops in the House of Peers?"

He became purple in the face. He felt a raging lion grow and growl in his breast, and he looked at her with angry eyes, which immediately assumed a gentle expression, for she was exquisite, white in a blue dress, delicate in large, billowing sleeves, and her hands were a delight, soft and tapering, with pink nails, which he had so often held, so closely pressed, so warmly kissed! Heavens, how cowed and wretched the lion felt!

After an hour which seemed as long as a century the confessor took his leave. With tears in his eyes Balzac exclaimed: "Have you, then, the mind of a criminal to conceive such torments? Didn't you feel that I was suffering, that I was being killed, that I was about to get up, that I would take vengeance?"

II

"Come, come," said she, shrugging her little shoulders, "try and behave like a member of your party! You know very well that religion is closely bound up with property."

She adjusted a log on the fire and tried to wound him. "When one is noble, one must assume the responsibilities of one's class! Now, you are noble, for, in fact, you have been signing Honoré de Balzac ever since you were twenty-seven, and you gave up your particle only once, didn't you, when you went into the printing business?"

He thought that he would throw himself upon her. He almost shouted at her: "What a monster you are! I was not deceived!" But he never had an impulse which was not controlled by his imagination, and his imagination suffered the generous pressure of his heart. He stopped, sat down, clasped his head between his hands, and groaned: "Oh, my God! My God!"

He had just made the discovery that she was perhaps sincere in her scruples, and that, on the point of yielding, in a last fit of apprehension, the only expedient she could think of was to make herself hated. Then he exclaimed: "I understand. You are heroic! You want hatred? You shall have love, still more love! —"

The footman announced somebody. The lion shook on his legs. He withdrew, overwhelmed, casting distracted glances upon the object of his passion.

That same evening he found a letter waiting for him at home from a very good friend of his, Mme Zulma Carraud. She was the same age as his sister Laure and a school friend of hers. He had seen her again, when, as the wife of a captain of artillery, she was living first at Versailles and then at Saint-Cyr. At that time he thought he required to be documented for his famous

Bataille and he had frequented military men. Then, after the Captain had been promoted to the rank of major, the Carrauds had gone away to live at Angoulême, to take charge of the powder works which had just been erected there. Mme Carraud had delicate perceptions and was sensible; her mind was as acute as it was distinguished: she appreciated the high talent which had gone to the composition of *Les Chouans* and *La Femme de trente ans;* she would have been delighted to entertain the author of these works, and she wrote: "Do come, dear Balzac; the Major is waiting for you. We shall not be in your way. You will work better here than in Paris, devourer of men!"

He was in no condition to appreciate the kind and delicate friendship of such a letter; he replied that, alas, he was not free. He was fastened to his desk like a convict to his cannon-ball! It was out of the question for him to lose two days in travelling. For him to leave his study was unthinkable. He couldn't even send a long letter in reply. This was the second which he was writing! What a life he was leading! And since the Carrauds showed him some affection, he would count upon their indulgence and their compassion.

This letter took him five minutes to write, and once again he plunged body and soul into his cherished madness. He was in his own house: he would imagine himself to be with her; he could see her, go up to her and touch her. And it might be that she was artificial and insincere; that her heart was as plastered over with cosmetics as her face. But, even in her insincerity, what a fine woman she was and what an aristocrat! Never a commonplace feature! When he applied his mind to it, he recovered all his strength and it was self-conceit which gave it all back to him again. "With a choice

woman there are always ways and means," he thought; "I do not worship her for nothing. My task is clearly defined. — I have seen her too fluttering: there is everything to be hoped for. I shall make her a *true woman!*"

Thenceforward he accosted her only with high feelings of chivalry. Hell had lasted for three months: he determined to transform it into a paradise. He no longer stormed and threatened; he gave up entreating her. She thanked him for his change of attitude on the 16th of May, which was his feast day, by sending him some flowers. He thought them so beautiful that he had some of them dried and placed them in his books. Then he appeared as though he knew what the future held in store, as though he had no doubts about it, and he greeted it with smiles in anticipation: "How happy we shall be, madame," (he was leaning upon her shoulder) "— when you are my mistress!"

One day she said to him with her habitual arrogance, which he found captivating: "Well, supposing — I do give in to your fearfully vulgar desires ——"

He kissed her hands passionately. "I worship you!"

"And then you afterwards play me false — what guarantee have I got?"

"I swear," said he, "I'll kill myself if I betray you!"

"Then, in that case, you're a dead man," she coolly replied.

What exquisite emotions she was making him experience! "Give me the forehead which can conceive such ideas, the lips which give them expression! Give me ——"

Once more she permitted the boldest caresses, with her astounding unconsciousness, or — the supreme cleverness of her viciousness. Then, one day when, after so many liberties taken, he caught a glimpse of the felicity

he so ardently desired, he found her busily giving orders in a house in which the servants were rolling up the carpets and putting covers over the furniture. He stammered: "What's happening?"

"There is happening," she observed in her soft, shrill voice, "what I told you before, more than a week ago, but you never hear anything but the sound of your own voice — I am going to Aix for a holiday."

"Aix?"

"Aix-les-Bains. And whenever you like to come and see me ——"

"I! Oh, never, never!"

Once again he was like a lion, breathing fire, with flashing eyes and bristling mane.

"But what sort of a woman are you?"

"Here," she retorted, "there's my friend the Marquise de la Bourdonnaye, who knows me very well. Ask her if you like."

He never saw her again. He let her go, and sobbed, on returning home, cursing love, for he felt himself becoming wicked, full of hatred, and in the wrong. Ah! how strong was the need he felt of a gentle soul to comfort him and to restore him, to make him once again a normal human being — generous to boot! He thought of Mme de Berny. But he felt it impossible to see her just then, to undergo her interrogation, to admit to her, "such an angel," that despite all the atrocity of suffering which that soulless woman inflicted upon him, he was still aflame with desire. — What then was to be done? — For some days he tried to forget. He entertained his friends, drank, spoke, held forth violently, ordered new suits, for he found it impossible to go on wearing the clothes he had worn for the Marquise and which she professed to like; he shut himself up and tried to write;

alas, all he had in mind was a spiteful book in contempt of love, and all that he saw was a few incidents and no whole. At last, while sorting his papers, he came across Mme Carraud's letter, the kind, honest, loyal letter of an admiring friend: "Come, dear Balzac, we shall not be in your way. You will work better here than in Paris, devourer of men." He saw a chance of rest, a period of tranquillity, the opportunity of unbosoming himself to a woman of heart, who would listen to him and be able to understand him. With a shaking pen — for he would have liked to be arriving at Angoulême that very minute! — he wrote: "I am coming — if you still want to have me."

Dear honest Carrauds! They were all, mother, father, and child, waiting for him, on the look-out for him. They had put flowers in his room. And still that stage-coach hadn't come! God grant that there had been no mishap! "No! There he is! The dear man! Now, then ——"

"Well, then," said Balzac, in a voice quivering with emotion, "I know what happiness is now that I see you! — Dear souls, what a consolation you are to me! You free me from my galley-slave's oar; I feel that you like me; I am coming to you as to a good doctor! I have left behind my enemies, my business, and my papers, every mortal thing! I am coming to you with my heart only. Tell me the hour of meals, when you go to bed, what games the child plays, if you sleep of an afternoon in the meadows. — I am your child home for the holidays. Make me thin slices of bread and butter. Shall I water the kitchen-garden? I want to look after the rabbits! — My dear friend, how well you look, you first of all! And the Major! The picture of health! But he's growing stout! Ah! Ah! — What's he saying? That I'm growing stout as well! But I tighten my belt. A man must

The real Maison Vauquer of Père Goriot at No. 24 Rue Tournefort. Identified by Dr. Benjamin Ellis Martin

tighten his belt, Major! — You know how much I love this court-yard and this house. It is not bad at all for a powder factory. And you've got lime-trees! Splendid! Have you gathered any flowers? How delightful the air is! How good it is to be here! Dear friends, amongst you I shall restore again my poor, battered soul!"

He had in goodness of heart all the charm of those who are rich, who are freed from the necessity of making a reckoning, and for whom the greatest pleasure in the world is to see the eyes of friends swimming with affection.

Madame Carraud shyly observed: "I hope that I haven't become too provincial for your liking. . . . Oh, but I have grown a certain coat! — But, if you like me, you will find me underneath!"

"Your coat charms me," answered Balzac, with a hearty laugh. "It's like moss on the loveliest stones! Bless nature, O Lord! I need nature when I escape from Paris."

"Yes," said the Major, "but Your Elegance will suffer! What have we not read about you, dear sir? You can't deny your reputation! It seems that not only do you follow the fashion, but you even create it!"

"Nonsense!" said Balzac.

"And not only do women go after you," said Mme Carraud, "but you go after them!"

"Rot!" said Balzac. "Let's talk about yourselves. Do you see many people?"

"An enormous lot," answered Mme Carraud. "I, for example, see the Major and Ivan. The Major sees Ivan and his mother. Whilst Ivan sees me and the Major. Without counting in all the associations by twos! Ivan and I see the Major! The Major and I both see Ivan. —"

"Ah — now that I'm here," said Balzac, "it will be very different! You, Balzac, and Ivan ——"

II

"Stop! Stop!" said the Major, "come and have a look at your room. Unfortunately, you won't have here all your servants ——"

"But I shall have your servant!" said Balzac.

"Precisely," said Mme Carraud, "and she's a very stupid girl."

"That's because she doesn't read me!" said Balzac.

"We'll give her *La Femme de trente ans*," replied the Major.

"Ah ha!" exclaimed Balzac, "and you've got peach-trees."

"And we shall have peaches too, but you will have gone," said Mme Carraud.

"Who can tell? Perhaps I am here for ten years!" sighed Balzac.

"In that case, we shall leave you," said the Major, "for I've every hope of being appointed elsewhere! Come inside. You are at home!"

The house was unpretending and well lighted. A drawing-room and a dining-room on the ground-floor, the bedrooms aloft, Balzac's separated from the Carrauds' by a narrow closet. Ivan had left his wooden horse in Balzac's bedroom. Balzac bestrode it and proceeded to mimic General Bugeaud. Ivan clapped his hands.

"Excuse me," said the Major; "I must leave you. The powder works summon me!"

"Go, man of duty," said Balzac, "and prepare your deadly explosions. I know what gunpowder is: I am General Bugeaud! Forward, men! To the attack! Keep your eyes upon my cap and my blameless head, and victory will be yours!"

Once the Major had gone, Mme Carraud said: "I will leave you to lie down."

"What! Leave me all alone? To die of boredom! My one recreation is talking," said Balzac. "Where shall we talk? Here? Outside? In the garden? On the banks of the Charente?"

"In the garden. We shall be able to keep an eye on Ivan."

It was a tiny little garden, from which there was a view upon a bit of a wooded hill, with nothing out of the ordinary about it, but it was good to be there; there were a few flowers in bloom; noisy birds were vocal in the thickets; and Balzac was so pleased to be with Mme Carraud! Such an attractive woman, so moving by the force of her unaffected honesty! One of those women of whom one feels, as long as they live, that their girlhood has been all innocence. The face was not beautifully shaped, but the equipoise of soul which it revealed gave it all the grace of a chaste mouth and two tranquil eyes, which saw and appraised with considerate charity. The least of her observations disclosed the integrity of her mind. She had a slight limp, which, at twenty, had made her a little bitter. One day when, in the course of conversation, she had let Balzac perceive how much she regretted this infirmity by the very insistence with which she kept on saying: "I never think about it," he had answered her: "Well, well, but your intelligence never limps! You'll be a splendid wife and a remarkable mother!"

She had not yet forgotten the graceful compliment. On her wedding-day, she had been happy, to be sure, and bright, but in moments of emotion her thoughts had gone out to Honoré Balzac, the brother of one of her friends, who had always such a pleasant sense of humour and who, with intelligence flashing in his eyes, never said anything which did not come from the heart.

II

They were not a quarter of an hour alone together before their sympathetic minds engaged in passionate debate.

"Dear friend," she said, "may I speak my mind out, as I do in the house with the Major? I am worried about you! You know how much I admire you, how I esteem your talents, how anxiously I await your books: I am as uneasy as your sister about the books which you will write to-morrow! And here you are, instead of saving up your energy, which you need so badly for your work, which is sacred, spending yourself, as I observe, and wearing yourself out in a host of activities which turn you aside from your true nature. Now, dear friend, it's that which you ought to cultivate, dig to the roots, so as, one day, to rouse the cry of genius which those who like you are awaiting. It made my heart sore, I assure you, to read so much nonsense about you, the receptions you give, the suits you wear, and your — your amours!"

"My amours!" exclaimed Balzac with a start.

"Why certainly, since you let them write about you that all the women who read you make love to you."

"It's rubbish, my dear."

"I know it is, but is there any smoke without fire? Is it true that you have a tilbury and a cab? And English horses? And a coachman in a princely livery? And that you go about with Mme de Girardin?"

"Oh, but she's almost a friend from childhood!"

"Good! I can't see that there's any harm in it — if the carriage belongs to her! But who is going to pay for yours?"

"I shall pay for everything down to the last farthing," exclaimed Balzac, in a flare-up of honesty.

"When? How? And then what labours, what wear and tear to discharge your obligations!"

"My dear, good friend, the future belongs to God! It is God who leads us. But I have no right to have a middling present. If you only knew how much thought I have given to all that, and how little I act without thinking! What's the use of civilization if the best of us refuse to take advantage of it? Refinements are for refined souls. Why can't you believe that luxury is every whit as much a necessity for me as household bread for the rest of men? There are blind folk who, when they look at two pairs of boots, cannot distinguish between immaculate varnish and varnish all cracks. But as for me, once I have noticed the difference, I cannot tolerate again boots with the varnish cracked. It is a mathematical impossibility! Ask Major Carraud of the Polytechnique to explain to you what that means. — You must not blame me for my eyes, my tastes, my mind, my fancies, or my poetry. For white linen is perhaps merely fanciful; the necessity of changing clothes is perhaps only poetic. But I feel the need of them. To the devil with expense and books of account! I buy first what is absolutely necessary for existence, and I pay afterwards — as best I can."

"Oh, no! no! no!" Mme Carraud would answer, and her dark eyes glowed with fire; "you try to convince yourself of all that, and it isn't true, it isn't you! Somebody has changed you! Who I cannot tell ——"

"Ah ha! Ah ha! — some woman, I suppose?" said Balzac with a sneer.

"I cannot tell and I do not want to know. But I, who can never cast eyes on a humble house, with two rooms, a little garden in front, and a potato field behind, without envying the humble lot of those it shelters, I cannot understand, my dear Honoré, no, I haven't a brain

capable of understanding how one can possibly desire to possess riches and all they represent of idle pomp, worry, fever, and injustice!"

"My dear, affectionate friend, then you repudiate everything which has any importance in society."

"The most important thing of all is the mind!"

"But it is the mind which constructs and buys and cherishes great houses, beautiful paintings, jewels, and thorough-breds!"

"The mind ought not to ruin itself."

"And again, we haven't all got the same destiny. So that I can come and rest myself in this little garden of Eden with the charming woman you are, I must surely have tired myself out elsewhere. —"

"You are tiring yourself out, I tell you again, in doing what isn't your work at all! You are killing yourself doing other people's work!"

"That's mere idle gossip!"

"Is it mere idle gossip that you are a legitimist?"

"Well, no, that ——"

"That you contribute to *Le Rénovateur?*"

"I don't deny it."

"And that you've turned yourself into the squire in attendance upon the Duchess de Berry?"

"Oh! Squire in attendance!"

"You, you, Balzac, born to lead the people (your own words to me), born to endow it with a liberal, generous, and ample work — you, with your intelligence, one of the finest of our time, reduced to the rôle of a court hanger-on! —"

"But really! Come! Never!"

"The hanger-on of an aristocratic class, quite devoid of wits, devoid of energy, devoid of soul, and grossly ignorant before all the moral needs of the poorer classes,

who are waiting only for the opportunity to take their revenge a second time!"

"O Lord! O Lord! Isn't she passionate?" said Balzac, clasping his hands and first gazing at her with admiration before going on with the discussion.

"Yes, it is true," she said, after recovering her breath; "it is silly of me to tell you all that I think — but I am too strongly convinced to keep silent about it."

"Dear friend, what a wonderful dear friend you are!" said Balzac, "and I am greatly touched. But if you want me to explain, you must allow me to explain. I swear to you — you understand I am taking an oath! — that I am incapable of selling myself, politically speaking, to anybody on earth."

She looked at him without answering.

"Even to a woman," he added, "for it may well be that I have been led away by a woman — been loved by ——"

She never stirred.

"Or a woman may have made me believe that she loved me!"

She retorted quickly: "Dear Honoré, I have not to judge that side of your life."

He replied, laying emphasis on every word: "I insist upon telling you everything, so that you may understand me."

She said: "There's the Major coming back from his office. We will resume this conversation to-morrow: it wouldn't interest him."

"Well, Major," said Balzac, "have you served well the State and the country, neither of which will ever offer you thanks?"

"So much the worse!" said the Major. "I am comforted for it in advance. Gossiping, here? Heavens, what

harm talking will have done this country! Do come with me and see the Charente flow!"

"Very willingly," answered Balzac. "The course of rivers is an excellent thing to watch when one's writing novels. Good narrative should flow from the spring like the water of broad rivers."

So that day of excellent friendship was quietly spent until the time came for the candles to be given out for the family and their guest to go up to their rooms.

"You are being given only one," said Mme Carraud to Balzac, "so that you may not feel the slightest inclination either to read or to work."

"I shall work in my dreams," came the answer. "Wish me a happy dream, in which you will find a place, you and your splendid logic of a well-bred Frenchwoman!"

When he was alone in their room with his wife, the Major remarked: "He is still the same good fellow — but in a fearful state of commotion!"

"He is a genius," she simply answered, as she looked to see if Ivan was asleep in his cot.

What happiness it was to her to take advantage all the following morning again of that genius which, with her intelligence and delicate perceptions, she had the wit to admire!

Balzac first of all told her what a complicated being he was: an artist above all! then a man of passion, combining the energy of a man with the sensibility of a woman; next a financier; yes indeed, an expert financier, for never throughout his life could he forbear from calculating in money the value of things; and lastly, principally, he was a born statesman, eager to enlighten his country. He set forth his program: "Separation of the clergy from Rome; perfect equality of the middle

classes; education for all! — You see that I hold your ideas, the ideas which are dearest to you!"

"Yes, you aristocrat!" she answered.

It was to provoke him once more to broach the burning question of the mysterious woman who must be a star in the firmament of the aristocracy, and who had converted him to absolutism, into an apologist for the throne and the altar.

"Ah! *Cara, cara!*" he exclaimed, "and so do you really hate all those who are of the nobility?"

She broke in: "Do you think I have so little common sense?"

The conversation had recovered the warmth of animation of the evening before, essential to the unbosoming of the heart. And thereupon he told her everything, the magnificent and painful story of the Marquise who was at once contemptuous, intelligent, loving, and a flirt. — Oh, how could he exactly describe her! She had in her none of the qualities which he had already observed in other women.

"Just think that she wanted to take me with her to Venice! In a palace! Where there would have been only us two together!"

What strange, enchanting hours for Mme Carraud to spend, who was used to a prudent, monotonous, passionless existence! She even began to grow more and more agitated at the narration of this too passionate and too painful adventure, when the Major brought in the mail which had just come. Balzac opened his. His face assumed an air of ill temper. He went straight up to his room. And at lunch he remarked: "A calamity! Goodbye to holidays! I must set to work! Everything's falling upon my head at the same time. There's a hundred pages of proofs coming for me. A publisher is clamouring

for a short story this week which I am under contract to supply. If I do not deliver it, there's a forfeit, and I fall into more debt. And my mother, whom three days ago I set up in rue Cassini, writes to tell me that everything's going wrong!"

All the excellent conversations were over! There would be no more chance for a display of trusting friendship. Balzac shut himself in and riveted himself to his task.

But from that moment also Mme Carraud never left her room: she took up again a tapestry work on which she was engaged. Ivan called for her to come to him. She said: "Go and hunt for snails, my little man! Play by yourself!"

And in the quiet, busy with her craft, she kept both ears acock and her whole heart for the least noise which might come through the little closet from the room occupied by the fascinating Honoré.

Ever since she had learned the details of his life, chock-full of work and adventures — above all, ever since he had related his own story with a fire which made manifest the reckless and extravagant way in which he consumed his life, she was lost in wonder, almost spellbound, and happy at having a humble destiny which for a few days ran alongside his. What a wonderful surprise the man was! How well he understood the hearts of women! She did not know a single other man, that was certain, with such a comprehensive intuition as his! She even began to wonder (and, in her absolute honesty, she blushed) if he had not guessed the passionate admiration which she felt as much for his character as for his accomplishments. And sitting up against the window, facing the lime-trees in the yard, busy drawing her needle, she was touched to the heart to have the life of another running a parallel course

with hers, for on the other side of the partition he was there at his desk, facing the same trees, engaged (who knows?) in writing superb lines which young men and maidens, in two or three hundred years' time, when nothing would be left of him or her, would be unable to read without feeling their hearts beat faster. And nobody, nobody would ever know that she was the woman who had felt the first palpitation and with what violence, good heaven! at the very moment that he had the pen in his hand! And why? Because she was Mme Carraud and not Mme de Ba —— Ah! but wasn't that wonderful name of Balzac striking and made to be famous! — Honoré de Balzac! — Alas, what are the designs of Providence? In the first place, no doubt, to make the creature suffer, so that it may become better. And yet a great man must be supported if one wants him to achieve his task. In that case, would she not have been some help to him? Would she not have been a useful woman, able to understand, to efface herself, capable of having, as in the circumstances she had, a motionless and unspoken love? — Lord! What thoughts was she risking! — She rose up, placed her hand upon her heart, asked God to forgive her, and went down into the garden to see what game the child was playing.

Many times more the noble woman was destined to commit the sin of the heart, who would have been incapable of uttering, in Balzac's presence, any words but those of pure friendship. But after meals, throughout which Balzac had never stopped pleading for the cause of everything that was beautiful, and glowing with enthusiasm for all that was great in men's lives, she felt the ineluctable necessity of going up into her room to recollect herself, a few feet away from him. On leaving the table he would set to work again. They were passing

through a very hot spell of weather. She knew that he was fond of ice. For two whole hours she hesitated about taking him some. "It will help him to work. —" And she was going to rise; then she couldn't stir; she listened. He had moved his chair. Was he about to come out? Already she was half-way up the staircase in thought, so as to meet him as it were by chance. — Not a sound. She drew a needleful of golden wool, which she chose because she had thought of his eyes, and she thought she heard him saying what he had been saying at dessert: "*Cara, cara,* yours is one of the few hearts which have great influence over mine!" Was it true? He glowed so quickly to forget so soon, like every nature generous in giving and prompted by everything! Oh, no, it was true. That very morning, in all trust, he had shown her a note he had received from Mme de Berny! Ah, how that woman must have loved him! What a good angel! — of whom she felt no jealousy. Oh, no, not the slightest! She felt that she herself was some fifteen years younger — and that they had the same ideas, so that she might, if circumstances had been different, have assumed by succession a protective mission. For the letter which Mme de Berny had written did not spare the Marquise, whose intrigues were now being laid bare to Mme Carraud: "If she writes to you to-morrow to come to Aix, to Aix you will go! Be careful, my beloved; people of her sort are ungrateful by principle." How Mme Carraud had triumphed at that passage which Honoré, without the least reserve, had pointed out to her, saying: "She is mistaken. — I will not go under any pretext — I am so well off here for working!"

He was so well off for working that he didn't come down any longer even for lunch. This was a very severe

blow for Mme Carraud. She did not dare to disturb him, for the Major had said: "He isn't hungry. He is in the fever of writing! He doesn't want to stir, and see that nobody brings him anything!"

She wasn't nobody. For all that she obeyed.

Balzac was busy on the manuscript of *Louis Lambert.* He was going over again, in a fresh, glowing access of memory, certain pages in which he described his tragic youth at school. And Mme Carraud began to think: "Perhaps it's Angoulême, our house, and my friendship which inspire him!"

One night he didn't go to bed at all. He had asked for five candles. — Then she herself found it impossible to sleep. She heard him move his coffee-pot, get up and walk about, drop his pen.

Towards midnight he poured out some water. "Heavens! his head must be on fire! He is cooling himself. What toil! What a heroic life!" Dawn broke. She thought: "He must be dropping for want of sleep. He is going to bed." But still she could hear the coffee-pot and the cup. "Ah!" she said to herself with a secret hope, "perhaps it is a woman's portrait that he's painting. —" Had he not said to her, on the staircase, with a laugh: "You shall have your niche in my monument and you shall see what a lovely little statue I shall put in it!"

And whilst her innocent heart was indulging this ideal dream, he was busy writing *La Grenadière,* without a stop, during a few hours of night. They seemed to him blazing with light, so brilliant, almost livid in intensity, was the clarity of his interior vision.

He saw once more the pleasant hill slopes of Saint-Cyr, which he had worshipped with the eyes of a very young boy, and really he saw the Loire flow by, green

and blue, slow and wide, with eyots of gold, a landscape which consumed his heart he was so fond of it. He, who had a taste for order and loved women, found therein, for pictures of life, the most exquisite and best-arranged setting, and, in an ardent impulse, he painted there the much loved woman whose affection had been the mainstay of his wandering youth. —

Whilst Mme Carraud's friendship watched and waited, he had just spent a whole night of grateful love with Laure de Berny.

He came out of the room, at once worn out and radiant. Mme Carraud trembled in case he should notice her drawn features. But his eyes were still gazing fixedly into his own heart.

He sat down in the garden. Little Ivan came between his knees. He said slowly: "Dear little fellow! You cannot have an idea of what one has to give of oneself, one's heart, and one's life to ——"

He did not end the sentence.

Mme Carraud, who had put on the dress which he liked best, a dress the colour of the moors when they are in poetic mood, so sorrowful and so lovely, asked him: "You are very tired, aren't you? —"

He looked at her with his enchanting eyes, wherein could be seen every sparkle of his soul, and he saw her at last — oh! not indeed as she was, palpitating and oppressed — but as she appeared to him to be, there facing him; and with a smile he said to her: "I think I've achieved something beautiful. — But when I feel as weary as I do now, I am almost afraid."

"Of what, in heaven's name?"

"Of — it's a terrible thing to say, of going mad!"

He was pensive for a moment, and went on: "I wonder what would become of me?"

She took hold of his hand, the aristocratic hand which she admired as she admired everything about him, and with lowered eyes she said in a voice which never quavered: "If you were to go mad, I should look after you."

He made no answer, happy above all to enjoy a silence which allowed him a few moments' recollection. Only the child made a noise with its spade. Then Balzac repeated to himself in a low tone the words which she had just said. He heard them with their full significance of spiritual value and their saintliness. — And he too closed his eyes, having before him the dazzling vision of the sublime.

"Hush! I think he's sleeping!" whispered Mme Carraud to the Major, who was bringing letters.

She looked at the envelopes and the stamps they bore. "Aix-les-Bains!" Her heart gave a leap. And first she breathed a silent prayer. "O God, grant that he will not go away!" Then she accused herself of cowardice. She leaned over Ivan and helped him to stir the sand. She said to the Major: "Are you all right? Is all going well? Are you pleased?" And she recovered herself, strong in her self-possession, in her true character, that of Mme Carraud, the wife of the director of the powder works at Angoulême.

Balzac left the following day, stammering excuses like a man distracted. At the last moment she brought him three written pages which Ivan had just found in his room. He was about to bid them all good-bye; he felt himself all over and said: "How awful! I haven't a penny left!" The Major loaned him a hundred and fifty francs for the journey. Then, whilst waiting for the coach, the two men walked up and down together under the lime-trees in the court-yard, and Balzac tried to persuade the easy-going Civil Servant that he was a

gigantic mathematical intelligence and that it was a great shame for his times that he should publish nothing. Mme Carraud, holding Ivan by the hand, appeared as though she were looking at a butterfly searching for a flower to its taste, and began to think of the dangers which attend fame, bringing into play the vanity of the most sensible women.

When the coach drove off, they waved to him affectionately, the Major with his handkerchief, and Mme Carraud with her scarf.

"Poor Honoré!" said the Major sighing. "I wonder what that journey portends?"

"More upset," answered Mme Carraud.

"What a misfortune!" observed the Major, "for as you were saying yourself — he has genius!"

From the top of his stage-coach (he had taken a place outside to see everything and to see it well) his eyes drank in the skies, the horizon, the landscape, the houses.

Not only did the movement of travelling always increase the activity of his brain, but in addition, as his heart was beating madly before the prospect of going to find again the woman who was the greatest passion in his life, he felt that all the energy of his being had increased tenfold. It was enough for him to catch a glimpse of a picturesque church in a village to conceive the romance of the life of the *curé*. Already he was busy sketching out two or three great scenes. — Then a horse would break its rein. He would look over and watch the postilions repair it and imagine all the life, by day and night, on the roads of France, the change of horses, the inns, and the incidents, both comic and dramatic, of travel, so crammed full of desire and hope and interest. Another fine book to buckle to! Then they

Mme Hanska. From a miniature made in 1820, the year of her first marriage

would stop, and travellers would get down, and he was to be seen, in his feverish need of hustling activity, helping them to carry their traps. What beautiful valleys and plains and mountains! What a kingdom, that lovely land of France, especially to one crossing it like a lover, saying to himself: "She is waiting for me; she has repented; she *does* want to give herself to me; in all the aristocracy of Paris there is not a woman fit to hold a candle to her!"

At Thiers, in his bubbling excitement, he was in such haste climbing the steps up to the top that he severely hurt his leg. He had to stay two days at Lyons, and he arrived at Aix limping. But once he saw her — he forgot even to mention his accident! He forgot also to recall all his old complaints. He thought only of finding her beautiful and kind and good. He frankly said at one moment: "How I have suffered!" But he quickly went on: "There is nothing great without suffering, and you have understood before me that there is no fine passion which doesn't at first require to be repressed."

She agreed with him and prescribed how he was to order his life. She was very glad to see him, but could not receive him every day before five o'clock, because she needed a very great deal of rest.

He said: "Good! Very good! I have my pen: I'll get through tons of work! And then I shall be absolutely free for you; that is to say, free for love!"

And the next day, although she had done nothing at all for him, he overwhelmed her, when he came in, with profuse expressions of gratitude: "Thank you! thank you!"

"For what, dear writer?"

"For being what you are, Marie!"

She was called Claire Clémence Henriette Claudine.

None of these Christian names seemed to him affectionate enough and he gave her the chastest Christian name of them all, adding: "Parents are so ignorant! Should women ever be given a baptismal name before they take a lover? Marie, ah, Marie, how well those gracious syllables suit your dear eyes! Marie, thanks to you, I have just been working like an angel. Telepathy, magnetism, attraction, how true it all is! And what a help you have been to me! I have a delightful room, from which I have a view of the lake and the Dent du Chat. Charming country, sweet to the heart of a lover! I know nothing more endearing than those blue mountains or the sight of that deep, limpid water. It evokes tenderness. I find once more the natural landscape so beloved of Rousseau, and I love still more deeply than he! In short, with my window wide open upon the country-side I have pictured to you, I had turned my desk so as to face the house in which you live. And I wrote, O heavenly beauty, as though the Holy Ghost had whispered into my ear. Truth to tell, nowhere do I get such ideas as when I sit by your side. You shall see my book. A wonder! It will cause a sensation!"

"What's it called?"

"*Louis Lambert.*"

And he read to her a few pages. Next day she sent him, by a servant, some good coffee.

He arrived on the stroke of five, or rather a quarter to, for he had scarcely the patience to wait for the hour to strike — always full of spirits, bursting with splendid ideas, displaying at table and in the drawing-room the same physical and intellectual appetite.

She wanted to test, in her doctor's presence, his loyalty to legitimist principles. He didn't wait to be asked twice; he made a generous profession of faith:

"No! A thousand times no! I tell you, doctor, despite all appearances, we have no king! There is only one king and that is God's anointed, for the king must be the owner of his throne as you are of your fortune; and between it and the king there are invisible relations which you will one day perceive."

He had lost none of his generous enthusiasm, and she was secretly pleased at seeing the complete influence which she exercised over him, for she led him both politically and in literature. Every day after leaving his work he confessed the good which she was conferring upon him. The idea which she had had of inviting him to this country of beautiful mountains would be productive for letters! — Not only was *Louis Lambert* making great strides, but in raptures of joy, which increased the animation of his mind, he had begun to make up some "droll stories," in which he discovered again the fervour, the rhythm, and the reckless merriment of the great Rabelais. He was as trenchant as Gargantua himself, when he used to read his jollities, of an evening, to his best beloved, and mindful of that giant of the sixteenth century who inspired and seconded him, he used to say: "If these stories make me rich, I shall not keep the money!"

"Bravo!" exclaimed the Marquise. "Will you give it to the sisters of St. Vincent-de-Paul?"

"I will give it to Chinon, to erect a marble statue to the true father of Pantagruel, and the artist shall carve on the pedestal: *To Rabelais, his master — Honoré de Balzac.*"

He arrived one evening wonder-struck. He had just been visiting La Grande Chartreuse. He had seen, seen with his own eyes, the act of communion between man and God, in the heart of a landscape as tremendous as

that vision itself, and he was anxious immediately to situate there the scene of a novel, *Le Médecin de campagne*, which should be a sort of social gospel. She thought: "No doubt he will dedicate it to me." Already she began to read: "*To Marie*" in the middle of a plain sheet. And once again she allowed him to become intoxicated, by her side, of plans as much as promises — which he imagined were being made to him, whereas it was he alone who was enunciating them.

The upshot was that he became more definitely insistent. She was very definite too and alleged her obligations.

"Heavens!" he exclaimed, "you always forget the most important: which is to love me! Don't I lavish upon you my ideas and my work?"

"And I, haven't I got you by my side?"

"You monopolize me," said he angrily, "if you refuse to belong to me."

She laughed — and sneeringly. "Come, come, your stay at Angoulême hasn't done you very much good! You come back with such mean middle-class ideas! The conversation of the women there can't have been very exciting."

Balzac was touched to the quick and roared: "Madame, don't try to wound me in what is dearest to me above aught else: my friendships!"

"You see," said she with perfect composure, "that I do not fill your life and that you are like the rest of men, a play-actor."

He did not answer, but returned home in despair, talking to himself aloud: "Poor Honoré, luxury, beautiful residences, great ladies, splendid amours, none of these things is for you! To turn out copy for voracious publishers in a miserable room at two francs a day, that's your fate: and don't try to find any other!"

II

But there were two letters waiting for him upon his table: one from Mme de Berny and the other from Mme Carraud. Ah! the saintly women! The two mainstays of his life! Real love, true friendship! He pressed the envelopes to his lips.

The tone of Zulma Carraud's letter was bitter, but it touched him to the heart. She warned him once more to be on his guard against the ferocity of a party, in which *they* thought only of exploiting him. "And yet it is perfectly true," he murmured, "I am beginning to be aware of it!" But, on the other hand, she gave him over to his perilous loves, saying: "It isn't the poor mother of a family who is capable of interesting you, a woman who understands the reality and the sordidness of life. What you want are fugitive forms and dazzling exteriors; it matters little to you whether or no they conceal within a mind and a soul. May God give you at Aix what suits you! —"

"No!" he exclaimed with violence, "now I see clear. I will run away, I will save myself, I will go back and work and be sensible and talk with them at the powder works."

And as he took up the letter from Mme de Berny, he thought: "They are like one another, not in appearance, but in character. They have the same sagacity and the same love of the good. —"

"Darling," said Mme de Berny, "I am not jealous, only anxious. So they have succeeded in making you come to Aix. . . ."

"She writes *they* just like the other," observed Balzac. "Poor women, they utter the same cry in the same suffering!"

". . . Be careful, love, all those people hate those who are not sprung from their sublime blood. Make use of

them if they can serve you in anything, but swear to me that you will not be their slave."

"I swear it, darling," said Balzac under his breath.

And without writing another word about the woman whom she described as *they*, an indefinite expression, rich in torments just as undefined, she ended her letter with an invocation: "The only pleasure I have is reading your *Scènes*. They give me memories very dear to me. I remember where you were when you used to read me such and such a passage, all you used to say, the words of love which they inspired. If one day you are unhappy, come to me; I never stop waiting for you!"

He took a sheet of paper and, leaning his forehead on his hand, wrote off the following:

"Why should I stand out against you, you who have been the nurse of my earliest dreams, and whose heart will be the grave of all my errors? You call me, and I answer. Watch out for the stage-coaches on the road to Fontainebleau. I shall be with you in a few days, in a few hours. . . ."

He had just handed over this note to be taken to the post when there came a knock at the door. The Marquise de Castries had sent a servant to inquire if M. de Balzac could come to her at once. He was simple enough to ask: "She isn't unwell, is she?" And he ran.

How youthful he was, an hour later, in believing in happiness! Had he not just agreed to leave for Italy with her and Lord Fitz-James, her brother-in-law? They were taking him as an additional travelling companion in their carriage, and in order not to hurt his sense of delicacy, she agreed that he should pay his share of the travelling expenses. Lombardy! The Campagna round about Florence! And Rome, the city in which one half of the important history of the world had been enacted

— to see them all in her company and her eyes at the same time, and to hear them all discussed by her with her acute perception (just a little acid), so precise and so personal to her! What a piece of luck for a heart overflowing with love! What a lustrous episode in one human life!

In urgency he wrote to his publishers, to the editors of reviews, and to his mother. He bound himself for definite dates, asked for money, promised manuscript in return, believed in the end that he had put everything in order, and went off with his "adorable Marquise" and the brother-in-law, whom he credited with all the virtues and all the distinction of the old legendary France.

Having left Aix in the morning, the three travellers arrived the same evening in Geneva. All through the afternoon Balzac had been absorbed in thought and taciturn. He was attempting to form some notion of the days which he was going to live, by recalling the most delightful particulars of the days which he had lived. One walk especially had left him with a feeling of exaltation. By the side of a stream, behind a mill with a broken wheel, she had spoken to him such burning words of passion that it was no longer possible that she should now draw back. And surreptitiously he would glance at her in the coach, and from time to time she would smile at him.

They had supper. The conversation was animated, and then, when Lord Fitz-James had gone to the office of the hotel, Balzac remained alone tête-à-tête with the Marquise. She was wearing a bright, flimsy dress, with flounces, which gave her an ethereal appearance. He gazed at her in devout admiration and then, with his air of a nice, well-behaved child, said to her: "It seems

to me that you have just come down from heaven to make me happy."

Her only answer was a smile.

He went on: "Will you make me happy?"

Then, in a whisper: "Will you give yourself to me at last?"

She shrugged her shoulders, and abruptly her expression changed: "To speak in such a fashion to a woman who bears a great name, in a casual inn!"

He exclaimed: "What do you mean? An inn?" And angrily: "Do you want to cheat me over again?" He looked very stern. "I will not put up with it!"

And of a sudden he became exceedingly violent. He told her that he had had enough, that he had considered everything, that the only part which a woman who pretended to be in love could decently play was sacrifice, accordingly to give herself, but that, alas, he believed that she was incapable of love. "A Marquise lends, but does not give herself!" he exclaimed. "Very well, then, I prefer women of easier morals, that are not hypocrites and without the mess of social seasoning which is merely vice! I leave you and I'll be revenged!"

He was standing by the door. He advanced upon her, crushing her arms. "You are the last in the world to pray for aid to either laws or religion! You have broken the one and laughed at the other, for one day you did give yourself, for you were once the mistress of Prince Mett ——"

She thrust him away: "Enough!"

His eyes in her eyes, he thundered at her: "Yes or no, in Italy will you be mine?"

She sat there with clenched teeth and panting nostrils, almost livid, very nearly ugly, for the loathing depicted in her face, and she answered nothing.

He asked her again: "You don't want to answer?"

She persisted in an obstinate silence.

Then he felt within him the fiery impulse of great frenzies and lost his self-control. He threw his cape over his shoulders, swinging it under the face of the Marquise as though he were horse-whipping her. He strode out, banged the door violently, took his belongings, leaped outside the hotel, caught sight of a stage-coach leaving for Dijon, and jumped inside.

As they were leaving behind the last houses in Geneva, his neighbour, a young man, remarked aloud: "Farewell, dear city. — Ah, sir, how beautiful is Geneva!"

"I abominate it!" replied Balzac. "I have experienced there, sir, the worst humiliation of my life and I swear I will never return to it again!"

On the day following but one, he reached La Bouleaunière, his body bruised with travelling, but his heart eased, for in the exhaustion of the body everything else gives way, and great sorrows abate. Mme de Berny and her dog were waiting for him by the roadside. Why, for the past week she had been on the lookout for every stage-coach that went by! Every single one!

"Oh, what numbers of dapple-grey horses I have seen and red postilions! My dear, great man, I haven't waited too long, for here you are! And do you come to me at least with a light heart? What's in your head? How are you? Do you love me?"

His only answer was to slip his arm round her. He took her by the waist, that dear little waist of hers, which still gave to the pressure of his arm, gazed into her dear face, which had grown so old during ten years of love and which began to blush, for she had guessed his

thought, but quickly he gave her a resounding kiss, thinking in his heart of hearts: "What are youth and beauty worth, when they conceal a soul as ungrateful as the stones by the way-side?" Then he said: "I am very weary, my angel, very weary, and I'm afraid that I am not very, very kind. — Life hurts us."

"Dear puss," she replied, "you arrive all over aches and pains, and you don't know what you're saying. It is not my fault if you've mixed with silly women, addle pates, whose white skins and porcelain complexions turned your head. Forget it all here. — Inhale the fragrance, O my darling, of the sturdy pines. And come with me and see my poultry yard, where I get good fresh eggs. —"

He was to recover quickly by the side of this woman who knew how to win him back and make him happy in every kind of way, even by flattery, the attraction of which had not been spoiled for him by sorrow.

"You know, darling, your success is tremendous. Smart women now do their hair like *La Femme de trente ans:* I read about it in a fashion paper. And the menus of the Rocher de Cancale are taken from the feast in *La Peau de chagrin.*"

Even to the letters from women which he used to get, and upon which she would comment to him as he would have done himself in an undertone: "Dear, fertile author, they are all at your feet. Read this: it's an old maid taking up the cudgels on behalf of spinsters and bachelors. Poor old thing! She deserves an answer. — Here's a purveyor of subjects. A pedantic lady. Above all, she mustn't receive a word! — Here's a bold one, but contemptible at bottom. You might send her a couple of lines. Here's a beauty: 'I should like to know if you come up to the idea which I have formed of you

in reading your books.' — Very well, then, what idea has she formed? Let her say what it is, the goose! — 'I should like to know if your marvellous creations spring from the head or the heart. —'"

"They spring from the spleen," said Balzac, "and she shall never know! But I will tell you this, my dearest love, which is worth knowing."

"You look very grave."

"I am merely happy. As soon as ever *Le Médecin de campagne* is finished — I feel in the mood, you know — I am going to tackle a terrible book! Terrible and ——"

"Wonderful!"

"How have you guessed it?"

"Because I love you!"

"It will be a book about love ——"

"About me?"

"No!"

"Why?"

"Because it will be a book of suffering, fearful but true."

"And it will be called ——?"

"*Ne touchez pas à la hache*. There will be in it a certain Duchesse de Langeais ——"

"Who will cause you suffering, my darling?"

"Who will cause my hero suffering."

"My poor beloved! You must necessarily feel what he feels."

"There is nothing to fear. La Bouleaunière, your caresses, and your kind words have made a completely new man of me! I've got hold of a great subject and I'm going to master it."

As he said that, his eyes shone like gold, wonderful, conquering eyes; and as he leaned them over her, she thought she saw in them the effulgence of his glory.

II

Then in a voice choking with happiness: "Darling," she whispered, "you are to me more than the air to the birds, than the water to the fishes, than the sun to the earth, than nature to the soul! — My happiness exhales from you as perfume from the flowers. — Your gifts are immense, and it is my pride to understand them and to cherish them!"

3

When his novel *Ne touchez pas à la hache* was well in hand, Balzac experienced the joy of having controlled himself and conquered. Out of the narration of his weakness he made a strong story. Out of his wretchedness he produced a masterpiece. The contrast was a reflection of life: its squalor and grandeur; and this rough experience showed him, with such clearness as he had not hitherto realized, his destiny upon this earth: that he was to live on the margin of other's lives and that his first duty was to live only to write and to describe. He was entitled to love and to suffer and to be happy only upon condition of wringing books out of his experiences, and his books would be so many blazing torches in the darkness of men and women! For man struggles in the night; he is shrouded in mystery, and the only lights which he has to show him the way are religion, the assistance of which his pride often makes him refuse, and the poets, who, as best they can, seek to explain to him the part he has to play, his nobility, and his indigence. For a long time past Balzac knew that he was destined to be one of the latter; but now that he had lived and tried his wings, he felt inspired with the sombre power of the seer.

He was, moreover, upheld by souls of his choice. Laure de Berny, the dear mistress whom he loved so

dearly, had just read, although she was far from well, the last pages of *Le Médecin de campagne*, immediately after they had been finished; and she found them even more beautiful than the rest of the book. Mme Carraud, the ideal friend, liked *Louis Lambert* better than *Faust*; *Faust* seemed to her weird, and *Louis Lambert* human. Rare woman, for that appreciation she had deserved a copy upon vellum, and he was having it bound by an artist. Finally "the Foreigner," the admiring Polish lady whose first letter he had received a quarter of an hour before his first visit to the heartless Marquise, had continued writing and had disclosed her name: Countess Wenceslas de Hanska, and in lyrical letters she had given expression to all the impulses of a heart which Balzac's books had moved and sustained.

She was a very great lady, an aristocrat, rich, and a great power over there in her territory at Wierzchownia, near Kiev, an intelligence refined by birth and breeding, certainly one of the choice spirits of her time. He was drawn towards her by a passion which was assuming the aspect of a torrent: she kept telling him with such fervour about the importance of his work! In her letters she would run to him; in his he would fly to her. The hateful distance kept only their bodies apart; their minds and hearts were already embracing. For how could he not pay attention to a woman who admired him as no other did? Laure de Berny had genius in loving: God had created her to sweeten the bitter lot of her Honoré; but that divine "Foreigner" displayed such an understanding of art and of the rôle of the artist as provoked Balzac to exclamations of delight, and, stretching both arms out to far-away Poland, he would exclaim with all his heart: "Eva Hanska, my life is yours, for you are the only woman to have anticipated

what it would be in its plenitude, to understand its sufferings, its obligations, its ambitious plans!" Others, and they were many, loved him, and their affection was balm to him; whereas she admired him with the whole force of her unique intelligence, and that was as good as a collaboration. When he read her letters, he had no longer any doubt of the place he ought to make for himself, for she added reasons to her enthusiasm. Indeed he was, in her eyes, Moses upon Mount Sinai. It was his duty therefore to speak and to explain. Well, then, yes! That would be his great mission: to explain! To describe so as to make people understand; to write so as to illuminate; to show society as a whole, more clearly even than the sun shows it, for the sun in the heavens is unchangeable, and the vicious man escapes its honest beams; he can dig caves for himself and burrow in holes. Whereas the artist, with his lantern, goes after the fugitive, and nobody can disguise himself who is big and strong. Balzac was such a man. Therefore he would construct a great work and at the same time win that woman — a conquest at last which was worthy of him, inasmuch as it was in harmony with the duties of his mind whilst it satisfied also his taste for aristocracy and an elevated life, which his recent suffering had been unable to cure in him. Simplicity was not enough for him; according to him, it was suitable only for obscure destinies; a man in the public eye should have striking characteristics, a great title, splendid clothes, and such servants as made him noticeable.

It was all very well for good Mme Carraud, with her bourgeois name, to be satisfied with her humble station and her existence side by side with a Civil Servant; and besides she was but an affectionate friend and a confidante. Laure de Berny had more of love in her composi-

tion than blue blood, and chose love rather than an exalted station: she was a liberal. A man might easily give up his youth to her, but the strength of his mature years ought to be saved from her embrace. As for the formidable Marquise de Castries, she stood for an effete aristocracy which had retained only its outward semblance. A fine mansion, beautiful dresses, and a lovely body; no heart and no mind; Versailles without the king. True nobility is for ever enriching itself, therefore giving itself and uniting others to itself. The thrilling call from Wierzchownia was a signal from destiny! And so it befell that Countess Hanska, a great lady of Europe through her birth and her possessions, through her mind as sensitive to reality as to mystery, exact and lyrical, gifted for mysticism and observation, in the spring of 1833, a woman in a million, was the fortunate influence, the long-awaited power, thanks to which the innumerable ideas which in the past two years had been swarming in and streaming from the genial brain of Balzac suddenly crystallized into a magnificent unity. For two years past he had been overwhelmed by the creation of his mind. Everything tempted him and he spent himself on everything and organized nothing. One morning in May he felt himself to be tremendous. His mind was no longer merely a yard in which the most beautiful material lay about in the rough. A building was beginning to rise up there of such dimensions and magnificence as had never yet been seen in French literature. Everything held together; every plan was concerted; every idea was in its proper place. The enthusiasm of that admirable Polish woman had been a stimulus to his imagination, and in the month of sap and burgeoning, in full desire and full happiness, he began to realize his power, in complete awareness that

he was attaining without effort the desired summit, whence he could perceive the full scope of his work.

The realization made him so happy that it hurt him to be alone. There was nobody to whom he could communicate his joy. Dear stranger, he did not even know what she looked like and she lived eight hundred leagues away! What was the use of writing to her? He wanted a woman's eyes to speak to right away, in that first shiver of joy which was perhaps the greatest joy of his life; should he recapture such a lively impression of his strength and his achievement, why, Mme de Berny was at La Bouleaunière and Mme Carraud at Angoulême. But his sister Laure was in Paris! And, after all, it was she who had seen the birth of his ambitions. As a little girl, she had listened wonder-struck to the plans he had made as a little boy. She was the first to learn how passionately he desired to prevail by sheer force of mind, and all the wishes of her young heart had gone out to help him. It would have been base ingratitude and, even worse, sad lack of logic, to deprive her of her immediate share in his triumph, her who had been the living and sympathetic witness of his earliest aspirations! He owed to himself accordingly to fly to Laure, to take her hands, and to say to her: "Dear sister, do you remember the wonderful future which we used to dream for me in the garret at Tours? Do you remember? Everything? You are my darling Laure! Your brother, in happiness, comes to tell you that the happiness of a man is wholly contained in the dreams of a child!"

"Auguste," he called out to his young servant, "I am going out. Keep an eye on everything!"

He was already in rue Cassini.

"Sir, sir, have you any money?" asked Auguste, catching up with him.

Balzac and Countess Hanska. A contemporary caricature

"What for?"

"You told me, sir, to be careful not to let you go out without some money."

"I don't need any: I am going to walk."

"And for crossing bridges?"

"Give me a couple of sous."

He went off at a run. At La Bourbe he ran into an old man carrying flowers.

"Why, you're spring, my friend," he exclaimed. "Where do you make these marvels grow?"

"Why, sir," said the other, "I have three acres of garden over there on the boulevard Montparnasse; they must grow something!"

"You've got some border carnations there with a lovely smell. I must have some. How much the bunch?"

"To you, sir, who have such a kind face, ten sous!"

Balzac laughed and then hunted for the money.

"Curse that fellow Auguste, he has given me only two sous!"

He sent the worthy man to be paid a few yards off in the rue Cassini and continued his walk, smelling the flowers.

He was about to go into the Luxembourg when a cart bespattered him with mud. "That mud will bring me luck," he exclaimed. "Many thanks!" And he made his way under the trees, where students and old, retired men indulged their dreams, the former of the future, the latter of the past: he considered them all as though he wanted to show them the beauty of the present. Before going down the rue de la Harpe, he went by the little square which used to be called Saint-Michel, and went into the grocery store set up under the sign of The Silver Mortar. He was fond of that shop: everything therein was carefully tended, in good order, and

sweet-smelling. The provision trade, what a delight to the mind! He began to talk about his coffee. He filled the store with joy. The assistants had stopped serving customers. He began to praise the qualities of Bourbon and Martinique and Mocha. He pointed out that a fragrant brew was impossible without all three. He went on: "You have given me a packet of candles too many, and a sack of coffee too few; it should be quite the reverse; for with the help of coffee, I can see clear even at night!" A housewife burst out laughing. He took off his hat to her, then went out, observing: "Please don't treat me, I implore you, as an ordinary customer. Take great pains with my orders. I am fond of your establishment, which is a source of life. Cherish my life, which, to-morrow, may be a source of profit to your establishment!"

As far as the Seine, he went over in his mind his next works: "In two months I shall have published *Le Médecin*. In four, *Eugénie Grandet*. The country, and after that the provinces. It will be the turn of Paris with *César Birotteau*, of which I shall make a wonder, and the *Prêtre catholique*, a jolly good book! When I've finished those four, I shall be able to breathe: it will be a fine piece of work accomplished!"

He arrived at Les Halles, the humble denizens of which were a perpetual joy to him. At the corner of the rue Montorgueil he saw a crowd collected. He went up. A poor old woman, harassed by the police, was crying and groaning: "What do they want the likes of us to do? To sell our watercress without being observed!"

"Heavens!" thought Balzac, as he walked away, "there's the proof that we aren't all made of the same clay! And fame, my good old woman, what is fame?"

In the atmosphere of Paris more than elsewhere he

felt the need of it, and as he walked across the boulevard Poissonnière, where there was a constant stream of carriages and passers-by, he burst out laughing, alone though he was, when he thought of those short-sighted doctors who said that in Paris it was impossible to breathe. He dilated his nostrils. The atmosphere in that wonderful city was so laden with vital fluid that nowhere else was there such a stimulant for the nerves and the heart!

With such thoughts running through his head, he began to gesticulate. The driver of an omnibus pulled up his horses, thinking that he wanted to get up.

"No, no, thank you," said Balzac, "I'm where I want to go!"

He was just a few yards away from his sister's house. The Surville lived in the Faubourg Montmartre. He was red in the face and breathless when he pulled the bell. He could hardly control himself whilst waiting for the door to be answered. He looked like a merry boar. Two little girls opened the door.

"Hail, best beloved, most honoured nieces! Allow me to introduce to you Monsieur Honoré de Balzac, an author distinguished for some pleasant works!"

And he presented them with his flowers.

The little girls began to giggle.

"Good-morning, uncle! How do we happen to see you at this time of the day?"

"A secret, ladies, a secret! Is your lady mother at home?"

"Sir, we believe so."

"Will you please introduce me?"

"Step inside, kind sir!"

He stepped inside mimicking an old lady who makes her little belly heave upon her little feet.

II

At the noise of the laughter Laure appeared.

"You? So early? What's the matter?"

"Give me a kiss," said Balzac, "take a franc ticket — children free — sit down, and you shall be told the whole story."

He sat down himself and contemplated them. His eyes were wonderful to look at, he was so happy.

"How do you think I look?"

"What do you mean?"

"Have I got my everyday appearance?"

"You are hot," said Laure.

"You are red," said Sophie.

"You look pleased with yourself," said Valentine.

"It's the youngest who has the best scent!" said Balzac. "Valentine, my darling, you are very very hot, but *why* am I so pleased?"

A shake of the head.

"I warn you that it's serious," said Balzac.

"Good news for us?" asked Laure.

"Yes, Petrarch, wonderful!"

"Uncle's getting married!" cried out Sophie.

"With the Empress of China, who's being divorced," replied Balzac. "Ah, my little lamb, despite your eyes, which I love, you haven't hit it!"

"Well, then, you've written a new book!" said Valentine.

"It's certainly she who understands me. My friends, my three friends, come near, please; if you don't see clear, look close at me, take careful stock of me. Read what's written upon my forehead!"

With mouths that gaped, the mother and the little girls scanned his face.

"Well, haven't you guessed? Can't you see anything? Come on, now! Pay attention, you children especially,

who will remember this day as long as you live! Don't you see — that I am just in the process of becoming — a genius?"

With what a resonant note in his voice he uttered those words! And he was standing erect, with his arms folded, and his magnificent attitude signified: "This time you've got it? Splendid! Then, come and kiss me! Do me honour! For I tell you, though you are only two quiet little girls, busy playing with your dolls and toys, although your mother has her housewife's cap on her head, although Heaven does not send us the glimpse of a miracle into this humble room, I tell you and I take my oath, I do indeed, that we are passing a critical hour in the history of French literature!"

Unfortunately, he was the only one ready prepared to receive this marvellous piece of news. Genius indeed? — Can one even spare a minute to think what the word means when one is busy helping a maid to dust the furniture; one is taken quite unawares; what answer can one make? And — so one makes no answer.

"You — probably you haven't quite understood?" said Balzac in a stern tone, as he sat down again.

"Dear Honoré," remarked Laure with pretty politeness, "you're simply telling us something that we already knew. You are a genius — but you've been one a long time!"

"No, ah no, no, no, not at all," protested Balzac energetically. "Yesterday I was a blind man; to-day I can see and I see everything! I am like a seer. I see my life to-morrow and the day after, to the day of my death. It is ordered now, do you understand, and I shall never have to make any change again. I have here, in this head of mine which you gaze at and cannot understand, the plan of all my books! Every single one! They are all

in my head, one after another, and their titles too! All I've now got to do is to write them. And writing is nothing at all. A question of sweat and time. Where genius came was in conceiving them. That wanted a spark from heaven. But the spark came! It came down upon me; it illuminated me, and you all have films on your eyes if you think that this morning I look like other men. Yet I forgive you for that, for I have come to you to make it all clear. You are my sister and my nieces; the same blood courses in your veins as in my heart. I owe you accounts. Here they are!"

"Honoré — my dear," stammered Laure greatly embarrassed, "before you begin, tell me — it will take some minutes to say all you've got to say?"

"Of course it will! Why?"

"How long?"

"How can I possibly tell? An hour, twelve hours, what difference does it make to you so long as I don't bore you? And I cannot possibly bore you by explaining to you one of the great events of the age!"

"Of course not — and listen, Honoré, allow me a couple of minutes. — I'll just get things ready for lunch, and then I'll be all attention."

"There, now, isn't it awful?" groaned Balzac when he was alone with his two nieces. "Simply awful! Your grandmother, children, was all her life just like your mother. God Almighty, do you hear what I say, God Almighty in person might have knocked at the door and said to her: 'Madame, I have come to call on you!' and she would have replied: 'What! To-day? What a nuisance! There was I just about to make my tomato preserves. They'll be all spoiled if I stop!' There, my little ones! It has never been the family talent to distinguish

the essential. And that's why I am a monster in the family!"

Laure came in just as he was finishing the sentence, and remarked: "A monster whom everybody loves. — I shall be back in a minute. — Sophie, where did you put the house broom?"

Then, left alone with Valentine, Balzac went on: "Did you hear that? I talk of genius; they answer me with a house broom! And you sit looking at me as though you were terrified! Poor darling, you cannot imagine, little child that you are, what kind of a day this is that I am living. It's the thunder-clap upon the mountain! Your uncle has been struck by lightning, my lass, and set on fire; he's burning like a barn, and it's a stupendous sight! And the like of it will not happen again! And your mother, like your grandmother, will never have imagined it. Besides, Homer, Shakspere, and Molière all had mothers and sisters who busied themselves with brooms. And, upon my soul, it's I who am mad! For these women discharge their sacred duty, and heaven will be their reward, whilst the artist in this world already is in hell, poor wretch! He must always unbosom himself, always tell his own story. Can people spare the time to listen to him? Whom can he possibly interest? What? Does he claim to explain society by describing it? But men live very well without any explanation! Provided they can eat, and sleep, and reproduce the species!"

The little girl continued to stare at him.

"I beg your pardon, sweetheart," said he, "for all I spout before you. — Let's talk no more of it. — Have you seen your granny lately? — And how is your papa? — When does he come home to lunch?"

"At half past eleven," answered Laure, coming in again. She sat down and said: "I am all ears."

II

It was sufficient to see her, with her kind unassuming appearance, for his anger to melt.

"I should be terribly vexed to make you miss a whole morning," said he.

"You know very well," she answered, "that nothing interests me more than to hear how you are getting on."

"Well, then, here goes!"

He recovered all his light-heartedness again, and his eyes were full of stars.

"You know, my good Laure, what the novel has been like up to the present. Sad stuff! Something to while away the time, without object, and so, barren of result. Papa used to say: "The opium of the West." It was true. But supposing the novel, instead of sending people to sleep, was to wake them up; instead of amusing, was to instruct them! For amusement means distraction, distraction means turning aside, turning aside means straying away! There is a nobler task. Now, for years past haven't I told you that I would perform it! To-day I am certain I will. I see it as clearly as the map of France, with this difference: that it is very much bigger, that it is immense, that it is enormous! For if one of you were to put to me this very short and very candid question: 'What are you going to do?' the only answer that I could make would be the single word: 'Everything!' Yes, everything! I am going to paint the picture — the physical, psychical, physiological, metaphysical picture of our society! It is something so very lofty that there can be nothing above it."

The maid thrust her head in at the door and timorously said: "Madame — it's the washerwoman."

"Home with her," roared Balzac, "let her go home!" (He flashed two burning eyes upon his sister.) "The historian of the nineteenth century, do you see, won't

be a man who will relate accounts of battles. It will be me! No doubt your daughters have been made to read the *De moribus Germanorum* of Tacitus? No? Why not? They don't do Latin? Ah, that's a great mistake! There are some wonderful pages in it, which show me the way to go. And I shall do *De moribus Francorum.*"

The maid remained petrified.

"Come in or go out," said Balzac. "If the subject interests you, my girl, come in!"

Laure, red all over, tried to put in a word, but he went on: "This succession of scenes which I shall write will be literally the *Recital of Life in the Nineteenth Century* — in it everyone will be described. Masters and servants" (he cast a withering glance at the maid), "old men, children, priests, soldiers, Civil Servants, business men, scoundrels, and heroes! And where I shall be especially Balzac, where I shall resemble nobody, where I shall be greater than anybody, is that I shall not be satisfied with simply painting: I shall make clear cause and effect. —"

Laure had risen to her feet. He did likewise.

"I shall be a man of science as much as an artist. And I shall show men, by relating their stories, the laws which dictate their prosperity to-day and ordain their failure to-morrow."

"Will you allow me —?" murmured Laure.

"I shall be," said Balzac, striding up and down the room, "the Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire of the novel: I shall paint the various classes of society! In one book one class, in another, another: they will all have a turn. And that's the wonderful discovery I have made to-day: composition! Put each in its class! Everything will hold together, just as in life! Men, in the life of a society, help each other mutually, and everyone is dependent on

all. It will be just the same in my books, which will be mutually interdependent, because it will not be possible to separate anything so long as all has not been described."

Filled with enthusiasm at the idea, he smiled broadly and, with hands outstretched and mouth wide open, remained like one in an ecstasy.

"Honoré, will you allow me," Laure began again, "— a minute with the washerwoman?"

"The washerwoman!" he exclaimed, "but in heaven's name, let her come in! Let her listen as well! She doesn't upset me! Nobody upsets me! Only, I implore you, do not interrupt me at the instant when I am explaining to you what is going to make me live — and make me die!"

Laure was overcome and sat down again. The maid bolted outside.

"In a word, this is the scheme."

He placed the chairs to one side as though he intended to draw his scheme on the floor. Then he began pacing up and down the room again.

"We have already had *Scènes de la vie privée*, the early years of life, adolescence, youth, the joys and sorrows of young men, young girls, and young women, up to the time when the first calculations are made! The scene of the drama, here and there. Anywhere will do."

Sophie and Valentine had just taken up their places on tiptoe beside the window and begun to play with their dolls again. He sat down on the sofa where Laure was sitting and took her by the hand.

"Next we shall have *Scènes de la vie de province*, in which ideas and calculations take the place of fancies and thoughtlessness. The characters have grown older.

There is no more question, as there was when they were only twenty, of impulses and generous actions. Figures are discussed. And the setting? The background of small towns, because that is the most squalid. Petty bickerings, rivalries, and spying are the privileges of provincial life. But immediately after that, and by way of contrast, *Scènes de la vie parisienne*, brushed in broadly. The problem is becoming more difficult, lies deeper. We are approaching a society in which sincerity of feeling is exceptional. Everything has its price, everything is to be bought and sold. And for such paintings the metropolis alone is suitable. *Vie privée, vie de province, vie parisienne*, these three series are interconnected, and once these are achieved, everything has been said about man *qua* man."

The door-bell rang. Balzac appeared not to have heard it.

"Fourthly then, *Scènes de la vie politique*, in which I shall depict men representing masses. Fifthly, *Scènes de la vie militaire*, the awful consequences of politics: we shall see the masses facing each other, colliding with and slaughtering each other. Sixthly, finally, the nation; the nation at one time triumphant, at another conquered. It is all scarred and in need of rest; the evening of an arduous day; there remains for me to describe in all their sluggishness and serenity *Scènes de la vie de campagne*. And once I have done that, I shall have made the round of everything."

He walked up and down with a light step.

"I shall have presented mankind with an exact picture of society and all its consequences."

The door opened.

"What, alas, Walter Scott did not do!"

M. Surville came in. Balzac turned towards him.

II

"Walter Scott did not achieve the synthesis, did not complete the building. In order to build it, I must not let my characters go."

"Good-morning, Honoré," said M. Surville.

"What never novelist has done before! And it is a tremendous defect. In society, during one period, it is always the same people one meets. It is my duty therefore to take hold of them and to follow them."

"Good-morning, Honoré," said M. Surville.

"With me, they shall be seen at the age of twenty, at the age of their earliest loves, and I shall not let them go again until their deaths. Marriage, business, position, everything — I shall handle everything, I shall follow everything from book to book. How many novels will that make? Thirty at the least! Forty perhaps."

He was standing in front of the window; he was gazing into the street without seeing anything.

"What's he talking about?" M. Surville asked Balzac's sister.

He turned round. "You wonder how I shall find the time to write them all? — All the more so because they will be novels often in several volumes. What then? Will my life be long enough? How long shall I live, according to you? Eh? I'm growing stout, but I am strong. I shall be thirty-four in a week's time. It's nothing, thirty-four! I couldn't very well begin earlier. And it would indeed be the very devil if — I hadn't still — thirty years before me. Thirty years for sixty books? Ah! I shall do more than that! It will be sufficient to order my life: I shall begin to order it to-morrow. I am going into the monastery of literature! I shall build my own cell with my own hands and enclose myself. Don't smile, my dear Surville! I haven't wished you good-

morning, to be sure. You're all right? — Yes, my dear chap, I shall shut myself up like a Carthusian: they say prayers and make a liqueur: *I* shall make a book. And I shall not let the life of Paris wear me out any longer, I swear to you!"

His face, which had been strained while he set forth his scheme, now expanded. Whilst speaking of monks, he had assumed the characteristics of the monk of fable, reckless, gossiping, and well-fed. And he suddenly said: "I am terribly thirsty!"

Surville rose and passed into the dining-room. "Will you have a glass of white wine?"

"Two, three," answered Balzac, "as many as you've got! I feel myself to be a bottomless pit, my dear Surville. Bottles have a bottom; not I!"

"Well, then, my dear, drink!"

"Thank you! I'll pay you back a hundredfold! For you were not present, you haven't heard a word of what I said, but Laure will tell you what my work is going to be like, that now I can see it as a whole. A veritable building! A cathedral! Instead of building, as they all do, a small house, then a second and a third, so many little hovels without either interest or importance, I am beginning with the church that can be seen all over the country-side and will dominate the whole. What very good wine this is! One can see here that business is prosperous!"

"Alas," said Surville, "you're far out! I have nothing but worry!"

"It cannot possibly be!" said Balzac, stretching out his glass.

And he stopped abruptly. "See what the association of words is! I think of the word *'verre'* [glass] and immediately call to mind Wer — det. I haven't yet told

you about him. Ah, my dear friend, he's going to make my fortune to-morrow! Werdet is the publisher of the future. Quite young, tremendous high spirits; ideas galore; boldness, originality — in a word, a man who inspires me with every confidence! I have thoroughly bound myself to him for my next books. I really believe that we are going to earn vast sums. — Your wine, you know, has an admirable body! Give me another glass. *Verre* — Werdet! Yes, I must go and see him, and this very morning too! I missed him yesterday; I have no more time to lose!"

He appeared to be already making for the door. "But you can't go before having lunch," said Surville.

"Yes, you must stay with us," said Laure.

"Oh, my dear children, I have just told you that I haven't a minute more to lose if I want to bring my work to anything. Lunch! There's no question of having lunch now for me! For the next thirty years I shall eat as and when I can!"

The little girls began to laugh. He assumed his pathetic air which was not devoid of vanity or roguery. "The little innocents! It gives them pleasure! They haven't yet estimated what the fame of a Beethoven, or a Michelangelo, was like! Everything great, my children, has always stood alone. I shall be great. Now draw the conclusion yourselves!"

This time he took two steps towards the ante-room.

"Good-bye to you all who are my mainstay and support!"

He looked at his sister. "Poor Laure, I've bored you terribly. Forgive me, like a good girl, and let it be a consolation to you that I shall bore many others. When one wants to rise above the level ——"

"No, no, not at all," said Laure gently, "you know

very well that you never bore me. You only frighten me. I feel you to be caught up in such a whirlwind! — What a life you are going to make for yourself! What endless worries! You will never be happy!"

He opened the door.

"Bah! that's the very least of my worries. Provided that you are happy!"

Surville seemed preoccupied. Balzac took him by the hand. "My worthy Surville, remember well what I am about to tell you. It is likely that I am undertaking a tremendous task, and so new that it will be such a success as has never been seen before." (He called his sister to witness.) "Yesterday I shouldn't have said that; to-day I have wonderful warranty, for I am master of all my subjects; my statues are all in their niches; everything is just right! So riches await me. Then, Surville, if I am rich and you are not, these children's dowry is my business and ——"

"Please stop, Honoré," said Surville, feeling rather uncomfortable.

"My friend, I didn't ask you for your advice," went on Balzac. "Besides, I shall go about it in such a way that you will have no scruple to make you refuse. For if you want to earn their dowries yourself, you will earn them, but through me! I shall be wealthy, so I shall be within my rights in having a house built for me. In that house I shall need water: I shall be within my rights in having an aqueduct built for me; and if it pleases me, to ask you to build it!"

"Well, then, yes, all that," said Surville smiling.

"All that isn't castles in the air. I must go. But ask Laure immediately, my friend, to explain to you what I propose to do. You think you know me: you will be dazzled!"

II

He kissed his sister and the two little girls, twice on each cheek. Then he clapped his hat on his head.

"Surville, I've got hold of the great work of the nineteenth century!"

"Bravo," said Surville, "the first happy man ——"

"Will be me!" exclaimed Balzac. "Good-bye!"

They were all standing on the threshold of the door. With one foot on the first step, he said again: "The society in which we live was made by Napoleon, wasn't it?"

"No doubt about it!" said Surville.

He turned round again half-way down and, beaming: "Well, I'm going to make another! And one, too, which will be just as important, just as alive, just as true! And people speaking of my characters will confuse them with historical characters!"

"Well — it will make us all very proud," said Surville. "Courage!"

"Thank you," said Balzac. "You are all as good as angels to me. I love you as though you were my children. I'll see you again very soon."

He had disappeared; Surville was closing his door.

"Surville!"

"Honoré?"

"Do you know in one word what I shall do, my dear chap? Ah! Ah!" (His sonorous voice, a voice of brass, boomed all over the staircase.) "I shall rival the census!"

4

In all Balzac's life there was never any more radiant springtime than that of 1833. Not only did he experience the joy of conceiving a work which seemed to him the greatest of the century (and the joy was so strong that

after it he might have died without a regret), but in writing to Mme Hanska, in waiting for her and hoping for her and desiring her, in speaking about her to himself alone, he believed that he held love between his hands as one would hold a beautiful dove, and he would place his hands against his heart, as he apostrophized his papers or his garden: "I love you! I love you! I worship you!"

Then, bursting with impatience, overflowing with high spirits, eager to talk, he took the stage-coach to Angoulême.

"Ah, my dear Major! How are you? — and how's the saltpetre?"

Thereby he intended to convey: "Worthy man, please go back quickly to your office! Your dear wife and I want to have a talk together."

"Do you still like my garden?" asked Mme Carraud. "You see that life is unpretentious here as ever. Flowers and birds, a little boy growing up, the Major serving the State to the best of his ability, and a quiet woman, whose one desire is to keep her common sense."

"And as for me, all this while, my dear friend," said Balzac, "I have been working, working like a hack! At what? At everything! They are reprinting *Les Chouans*: I am going over it again. I am finishing my *Médecin de campagne*, which Mme de Berny, the dear angel, thinks the best thing that has come from my pen. And I am beginning the *Histoire des Treize*."

She looked at him steadily and said: "You have youth and strength. I am happy to see you at this moment."

And she explained to him how greatly she was pleased that his name was never mentioned in any critical article in which the books of the day were reviewed. That

proved that he went on with his work in complete independence, without wasting any time in licking the boots of the critics!

He held out both hands to her. "Matchless woman! You combine lyricism and reflectiveness. You understand, my dear, how much an artist is misunderstood. Heavens! Can an artist be properly appreciated until after his death? Dear friend, I shall triumph, I have not the slightest doubt now, and I shall owe it all to a woman! Woman! You know, better than anybody else, that that is the only religion I have professed on this earth. Well, then, now I am happy. And so, from now onward, my work will be very easy to do."

"Dear Honoré," said Mme Carraud with an impulse of sincerity, "how pleased I am to see that you have left the awful society I need not mention, to see that you have gone back to the woman who has all my esteem; I would even say, my holy gratitude. How often my thoughts have gone out to her ever since you told me of your youth, sustained and made beautiful by 'that angel' as you have just described her!"

Balzac assumed a curious expression. "Ah, well — well — hum!"

He coughed, rose up, and sat down again. And — he explained, oh yes, very quickly and unaffectedly and volubly, that there was a misunderstanding. — Alas! Such is life. — Sweet Mme de Berny, yes indeed — she meant to him — almost more than a mother, but he meant a woman — who was his double! the feminine half of his soul, a woman coming to him from the far end of Europe, offering him all: love, a great name, riches! Ah, such a woman! He had never met her equal! Met — well, that was a hazardous expression, for he had never even seen her. But what letters! He had

them with him. He insisted that Mme Carraud should read them.

"My dear, sweet friend, I implore you, as a personal favour. I insist upon your judging me as Mme de Berny shall judge me whom you speak about so well! You are my two counsellors; she is the heart and you are the mind. I want my life to be great, but I live in a glass-house. Read them, please, please. Here is her first letter, adorable, starred with happiness and hope! You shall tell me if, besides you, any woman has better understood me than she. And *she* is a foreigner, but has received a French education, is imbued with our ideas, brought up on our poets. Here are the other letters! Oh dear, isn't the style nice and dainty? Isn't it irresistible? Feel my heart, dear friend. A sight of that small, delicate handwriting makes me guess the hand which has written for me and is so eager to clasp mine! And in the beginning I was cautious, upon my oath, canny as a solicitor, and adroit and stand-offish, artful and sparing of my heart, because I had become a frightful character through association with that marquise, and the sight of so much calculation had dried up my heart — awful, isn't it? — and I would say to myself like a presiding magistrate: 'Let her come: we shall soon see what she has got to say.' Poor little thing! Soon she had nothing more to say: she was giving all she had! Then I grew ashamed of myself and I delivered my soul to her. Yes indeed! I told her everything. I am hers. She has only to move a finger: I will obey. And so you see me happy, my dear friend, so happy that I could cry, because I feel that I have recovered again my capacity to believe, and, in a word, after all my sufferings, I find myself again — whole!"

Before such an avowal, Mme Carraud very nearly

found herself in the same state as she was in a year earlier, when he was writing in his room and she, with so much ardour, was watching and waiting in her own. Marvellous magician, once he began to talk! He was as generous as the midsummer sun, and she had to make such an effort as gripped her heart to stay dumb at such a confession, not to exclaim outright: "How tremendous you are! How I admire you!"

Her grief expressed itself upon her face, and so she seemed quite natural when she said to him sadly: "Only be careful, dear Honoré, not to waste your life — for nothing, not to squander your treasures — and no result!"

And on his way back to Paris, he pondered over this piece of advice and thought: "Zulma is a very intelligent friend, but she leads a very narrow existence, which affects all her ideas. There's nothing to be done! It may even be, one day, between us two a cause for quarrelling — who can tell? Oh, not very painful: she is too kind. But a woman like my Eva from Wierzchownia grasps everything, has an intuition into everything! A great lady, that's the secret! Fifty servants. Estates the size of a department of France. One can't have small ideas after that. She has all the breadth of view I wish to introduce into my work. A breadth of view which comes naturally to the Poles: they are all heroes! A wonderful people! That's the dreamed-of alliance: Poland and Honoré de Balzac. Two poles of one and the same spirit. At the very moment she was posting to me *The Imitation of Christ*, I was beginning *Le Médecin de campagne*, in which I have only one purpose: the dramatization in novel form of the grand old book. Oh, it's all very affecting! What a splendid life I am going to have!"

II

Amongst the letters waiting for him at the rue Cassini he found one from Mme de Berny — a letter of complaint. She had become very ill. Her heart was affected. He said: "Poor darling! I must fly to her." But there was a letter as well from Mme d'Abrantès and one from the Marquise de Castries: the effrontery of it! He was so overcome with rage that he didn't dare to open it. He looked at the handwriting and the postmark. He felt himself agitated by conflicting emotions. His retentive memory brought back to him so many hours of anguish, so many happy moments; but the happiness was the shoddiest make-believe! Then what fresh lies was she telling him again in her letter? Inasmuch as her eyes had never reflected her soul, would a little ink spread over a sheet of paper at last disclose what thoughts lay deep down in the heart of a woman who had been born into the world to inflict suffering upon others?

"So we shall not bother about that!" said he.

And he opened the letter from Mme d'Abrantès.

"Oh dear! Always complaining! She wants to see me again! Poor woman! She has seen quite enough of me."

He heaved a sigh and immediately replied in swelling vein: "Those who are engaged upon a field of battle, my dear lady, are not free, as you well know, to talk or to acquaint their friends whether they be alive or killed. Now, I am killed with work!" He signed and sealed the note and was about to rise. With a trembling but impetuous hand he took up the envelope of the Marquise; he tore it open and read her letter right through without taking time to breathe. Then he took three steps in his room. And after that he sat down, closed his eyes, and murmured: "Lord! — What a riddle is life!"

Her letter was the very picture of sorrow, burning,

delirious, rending. It was an invocation, an appeal, a supplication. It awoke excruciating memories, stammered a passionate entreaty, sobbed in dismay; and it was signed: "Your lover" and "Marie" — Marie beseeching one word, one single word, one single little word of hope!

Balzac felt at first that his heart had stopped beating in his breast. "Oh heavens! Supposing it were true!" Then — a letter from Mme Hanska, which he knew by heart, suddenly passed line by line, and lilting, through his mind. He became serious, then, and very, very sad, and with a struggle took up his pen again. "Madame," he wrote and his hand trembled so that he could only half shape his letters, "here am I immersed in work which without mercy compels the most austere manner of life. At present I am in a cloister. The bell has rung. It is all over. I cannot go out to go into a drawing-room any more, however attractive it may be."

He re-read what he had written. He reflected once again, and said to himself: "Will she understand? She who did not understand when I rang merry bells, will she understand this tocsin?"

Then he snatched up a manuscript which was lying on his desk and ran to Mme de Berny. He found her in great depression, drooping low, and so aged!

"Don't look at me close, Honoré, I don't want you to. Heaven is taking its revenge for having made me too happy. You have a parcel under your arm. Is it a masterpiece that you want to read to me? Oh, read it, my beloved, read it quickly, and I shall forget everything."

It was *Ne touchez pas à la hache*. He read for four hours on end, and she felt that her poor heart, which had grown so tired of beating, was still capable of great

throbs of happiness. Then he came to the end and, in his warm, resonant voice, read as follows:

"Surely the beauty of a woman stricken with grief is the most attractive of all forms of beauty to the eyes of men who feel that their hearts hold an inexhaustible measure of consolation and of love for a being all grace in her weakness, all strength in her emotions."

Ah, what an effort it cost her not to throw both her arms round his neck and to tell him once again how much she loved him! But of love there could be no more question now. They had become two friends with — all that friendship cannot give: a store of passionate memories. And for happiness or sorrow — she was unable to distinguish which — she closed her eyes to hear him continue:

"Beauty which is fresh, coloured, and harmonious — in a word, prettiness — is the commonplace attraction of mediocrity."

"Darling," said she, as he was about to take his leave, "you are the first of our writers — and I cannot tell which I like better: your genius or your goodness of heart!"

The words were sweet to him, coming from the lips they did; and yet the summer passed and he never returned to her. He went on working and devoted himself to Countess Hanska. He was now imbued with the wonderful and unlooked-for hope of seeing her soon. She was about to start travelling; she was due to arrive at Neuchâtel with her husband, the only daughter that was left to her out of the five children she had had, and that little girl's governess. Neuchâtel, as well say Versailles! He would be there in one leap! Nevertheless, since he had acquired that certitude, his feelings had become complicated. The torture of loving without

knowing the woman he loved began to give place to apprehension of knowing the woman he loved. With what eyes would he go up to her? Would the first impression fulfil his hopes? He would give rein to his passion, then grow distrustful again. He would sing out aloud and then remain dumb. At length the time came to take the stage-coach, and, as on every occasion when he went travelling, joy predominated over every other feeling.

The coach was crammed. He made his travelling companions laugh with a guide-book, which he would read aloud in a droll voice: "'Neuchâtel,' gentlemen, 'a town more remarkable for its manufactures than for its trade, clean, rather too yellow and lifeless.'" At every stage there were thirty travellers clamouring in vain for places. He would console them with his "clean, rather too yellow and lifeless," which was the byword of the forty hours' travelling, as well as this remark upon the lake: "Stormy especially in the evening, when the west wind blows which the sailors call *uberra*." At Besançon he stopped for some business connected with paper, and then quickly went on; and he arrived at Neuchâtel without having gone to bed once in four nights. So to begin with he dropped into bed and it was only on the following day that he saw the Countess. He went to her hotel; they told him that she had gone out. "Good," said he, "I shall quickly find her!" He flew to the promenade along the quay and caught sight of her. He did not know her, but he recognized her. The warmth of his heart mounted to his head; he had no doubt. She was holding a book in her hands. Seeing the intensity of expression in the eyes of the stout young man, she let it fall. He pounced upon it: it was *La Femme de trente ans*. He took off his hat and, kneeling

on the ground, said in a passionate voice: "Eva! Eva! You!" She uttered a cry and, stretching forth her hands: "Honoré!" She was choking. "Honoré — de Balzac!"

He gazed at her and was incapable of uttering another word. What grace! She was divine! It made him quiver almost to find her at once so charming and so striking. There was charm in her mouth, which was small and red; in her black eyes, which were full of reverie; in her beautiful hands, so delicate and white, which seemed almost frightened at too much happiness. And she was striking through the dignity of her appearance and her Olympian forehead. "Ah!" said he, "I understand those grandiose ideas! Dear, dear Eva! —"

But a tiny little girl came up, toddling in a pink and white tippet.

"What a delightful will-o'-the-wisp!"

It was Anna, the child. He kissed her and spoke to her. And Countess Hanska, the while, took out her *lorgnette*, the better to consider him.

Short, stout, round, plump; jet-black hair; a nose like india-rubber: that was what she noticed at first. After that she noticed his eyes, eyes of fire, the same as fired his pen. And then she smiled; she was happy. It was really he!

"Eva, my dear Eva!" Balzac began once again.

A tall gentleman came up in a green frock-coat: Count Hanski. She introduced them. Balzac devoured the Count with his eyes, but the Count, who was scanning sailing-yachts in the lake through a glass, imperturbably continued what he was doing. Such an attitude had a double significance and made it sufficiently plain to whom the Countess would thenceforth belong.

"That fellow," Balzac was to say when he came back from Neuchâtel, "gave me the impression of a tower!"

II

A stationary tower, which was never in their way. The Count was not struck upon literature. For centuries past, in Poland, the men of high society suffered more than the women from the successive tyrannies which have oppressed that country. The women educated themselves, read, and conversed at home; the men endured outside. Count Hanski did not know a line of Balzac. He busied himself with his corn and his pheasants, hunted and farmed. He had considerable interests to protect. He had no time to spare for novels, or for those who wrote them. So that, at Neuchâtel, he allowed his wife to engross herself with Balzac, and for Balzac there began a succession of days the memory of which was destined to reverberate in his heart until his death. He had the confirmation, the warranty, the certainty, clear as the July sun, that he was beginning the grand passion of his life. And right away, he told the Countess, as he had told the Marquise de Castries, and with the same ardour: "I see that I have never yet loved. It is you who are teaching me the meaning of love. You are a divine woman! My Eva! My beloved!"

Then, with that need of unbosoming himself which was native to him, two hours after the episode of the promenade he was taking hold of her arm or of her hand. At first she was startled, but he hustled her with such a torrent of flattering declarations: "Your letters have told me everything! Nobody has ever written anything like them! I saw you when I read your letters. Don't be afraid: I will make your life as glorious as your lyrical soul deserves!"

Every time he felt a strong emotion, he would have deemed it hypocritical to delay the expression of it. For six months past they had been writing to each other the maddest and most poetical things! Could he see her

face to face and not exclaim: "Oh, best beloved"? And besides were they not "predestined" lovers? She was as certain of it as he! They had written it to each other twenty times. And, as he took her back to her hotel on the first evening, he told her already in a voice in which his soul sang and the desires of his body thrilled as well: "Eva, you are the wonderful, undiscoverable 'female.' Now I have found my counterpart. And I have nothing to give you, for everything, for ever, is yours!"

They did not leave each other any more. How she would please him in the hotel garden when, with an accent, which he found delightful, she would say: "Come under the *leems*"!

"Ah!" he would remark, "I shall put that into the mouth of one of my characters, a dear old woman, for example, so that you shall not be recognized! — Heavens, how beautiful you are to-day! What do you do to have that white complexion of dreams? And how I love your shoulders, your little round shoulders of love. Let me touch them. Nature there has achieved a masterpiece of art!"

Then a thousand questions would ensue upon the life she lived at Wierzchownia, and at every particular he would exclaim: "Oh!" and "Ah!" like a child. How he liked travelling in thought! What a relish he had for life! How he found in everything a cause for happiness! That wonderful Polish nobility above all, in which he diagnosed every virtue: had it not proved its worth in history?

"Ah, my dear angel, you belong to the aristocracy of the world. Countess Hanska, née Rzewuska! The first of these names is as beautiful as a conquering sword. The second, sweet as a love poem! You shall show me the arms of the Hanskis, and tell me about the marriages

of the Rzewuskis: it all fascinates me! In France we have no nobility left. It's all done away with. Such of our nobility as survives is withered up with hatred of everything which is not of its class. For example, I am beginning to exercise a considerable influence; they might have conceived a desire of enlisting a Balzac in their service. Poor wretches! They cling only to the outward form of traditions, the spirit of which they have lost; and they employ the little of life that remains to them in petty acts of meanness, which are their principal preoccupations. I confess to you that I am choking in France, and that for years past I have been making this secret prayer: 'O God, grant that I may go and breathe a different atmosphere. In Poland, it would be my dream!' Eva, you are the true aristocratic woman, the woman I am waiting for, the woman I desire!"

To such impassioned words she never answered in mere coquetry; she had no idea of slipping away. Quite the reverse, she would say: "The woman who will present herself in heaven saying: 'I have given happiness to such and such a soul' will always be admitted. Love is woman's virtue."

"Then to give themselves is their duty," was the immediate thought of Balzac. "That was what I said to that terrible Marquise. Here indeed is the wonderful and bewitching woman of my dreams!"

He was so firmly convinced that she would be his grand passion that, after that tacit agreement between them, after she had yielded all along the line, after so many sighs, which were meant to say: "I yield myself," he did not make the suggestion to her in burning words to come to his room. He was poorly lodged, and ashamed of his room; he postponed this happiness which he was so eager to secure, so that it should be more beautiful

and really complete, and he left her at Neuchâtel still faithful to her husband, but dazed and dizzy with thoughts of adultery.

She came, accompanied by the Count, to bid him good-bye as the stage-coach was setting out. She walked unsteadily, so that he could hardly bear to see her without feeling the fire burn in his veins. He said to M. Hanski: "How kind of you, Count, to come and see me off!"

And turning abruptly towards her: "Good-bye, sun of my days and light of my darkness!"

He looked at the husband. "I hope that your stay will continue to be pleasant. —"

He leaned over the wife. "Good-bye, my hope, my all-beloved, my own darling!"

Once again he addressed the Count: "I think that you are going to enjoy fine weather."

With his eyes, the colour of honey, he fascinated the eyes of Eva: "Good-bye — my wife!"

To take leave of each other after such raptures was to go away independently and live consuming days, in which they would give each other in correspondence what they were unable to give each other in reality.

"A kiss, my Eva, upon your beloved lips. — It goes only to your heart, and I wish it might go through all your body. You would then see how possession increases and aggrandizes love!"

In such terms the earliest letters were exchanged. They were to see each other at the end of a few weeks: they had plighted their troth. And each would be the other's. M. Hanski no longer counted. Eva felt herself mad with passion. She had to hold herself in check not to leave her husband. Her letters became cries. And Balzac, that furnace, had to control her. "Angel," he

would write, "no act of folly! Do not leave your stake, poor little tethered lamb. Your lover will come when you call. You have made me tremble!"

Thenceforward he experienced every joy: the joy of love, for he was madly in love; the joy of self-esteem, for a woman was offering herself to him; the joy at last of a life which was realizing itself with all the noble attributes which he had dreamed of. He was so happy even that he wanted everybody to be happy and he was ready, as far as his means permitted, to give happiness to all the men or women who had his affection.

One day he received still another summons from Mme d'Abrantès. She was finishing, in solitary misery, her life of reckless disorder. He jumped into a cab and went across Paris to go and read to her his narrative of the life of Napoleon, as told by a soldier in a barn. It made her cry and it very nearly brought the tears to his own eyes.

On another occasion he thought for long of the Marquise de Castries. Strange, terrifying woman, who seemed to be of ice, when perhaps her heart was nearest to the supreme gift of itself; doubtless, too, an unhappy woman, who because of the aridity of her heart did not realize the greatest joys life has to offer! He possessed them all; he thought no more of taking his revenge. Six months earlier she had written him a very touching letter: he took from his bookcase the manuscript of *Louis Lambert* and, full of compassion for the woman with whom he had exchanged, if not so much love, at any rate so much amorous electricity, sent it to her.

Lastly he went to see *La Dilecta*, who received him in tears. "My poor Honoré, do not misconstrue my sobbing. I know the sort of life you are leading, for your letters have told me everything or nearly everything.

I am not dying of grief or jealousy, believe me! I am simply dying, nothing more. I am dying — because one must die, because life is nothing and does not last, and hardly has one begun to do a little good when one must pack one's bag. But if I am crying, it is at losing you and for I know not how long, for once this world is done with, all is mystery. Honoré, I have loved you well. (Draw that blind, darling, I should like it better so. Only darkness suits the dying; death is so hard on love!) Honoré, I have come to the time when one tells no more lies: you can feel it from my breath that burns my lips; well, then, I want to tell you once again how much I worshipped you; and, for all my grief in leaving this world, I must add that God does well all that He does, for in my love it is your future that concerns me most. Being free, you will be able to love the woman whom you have just seen. She, I feel, will be the real wife for you!"

It was necessary for Balzac to immerse himself in work after returning home from such a visit, in order to diminish the sorrow which the eyes of the dear sufferer had caused him. He took up the pen once more: it wasn't work which he lacked! His hand was as rapid as his brain was nimble. Hardly had the idea been conceived when the word had been found and the phrase written down. His pen simply raced. Whether it was revision or creation, he crammed a morning or an evening's work into an hour. He was astonished himself. What a spur was love! The idea that he was going to find the Countess again, and that, before he could leave, he had a gigantic task to achieve, gave him nerve and muscle and blood and warmth, for all those are required to write a novel containing descriptions, reflections, confidences, and dialogue. The novelist

has to be painter, valuer, confessor, and dramatist. Is it asking too much to require the inspiration of an Eva? But she was always present, ever taking part in his labour. He was about to complete *Eugénie Grandet:* to put the finishing touches upon such a delicate portrait, it was from the eyes of his Eva that he sought counsel, by availing himself of all the knowledge he had of her soul. And every time that a great and generous idea, big in depth and in form, came from his pen, he was so convinced that he owed it to her that he thanked her for it in secret and would then write to her his thanksgiving.

Thereupon, like a merry fool, he would run with a thousand antics to drop his letter in the pillar-box, always with his own hands. Ah! the pillar-box! He thought, when his trembling hand let the envelop go, that it was a parcel of his heart which he was dispatching to Switzerland. Neuchâtel! Geneva! She was for the moment in Geneva! It was to Geneva that he would go! Fifty pages more on the Grandet family, and he would be climbing into the stage-coach. As for money, he would have as much as he required. He had just signed a splendid contract with the Widow Béchet, a publisher. Everything was going well; everything inspired him with confidence. She loved him; she was waiting for him! And he would now go into editors' offices with an air of triumph, and with his hat on his head.

"The pied piper!" remarked one day a bitter wit.

He heard the observation and asked the name of the impertinent fellow. The latter gave his name himself, and, as his occupation, man of letters.

"Man of letters!" said Balzac with a sigh. "What a title! Whence spring and whither go such folk, whose

2.

le siége de l'accusateur public, et du même côté, le long de la muraille, une longue tribune pour les jurés. En face ~~de la tribune~~ des jurés, une autre ~~semblable pour~~ les accusés et les gendarmes. Le ~~[illegible]~~ greffier en bas du tribunal. Une balustrade en bois ~~au bout~~ des deux tribunes forme une enceinte où se mettent ~~[illegible]~~ des bancs pour les témoins et les curieux privilégiés. Puis en face du tribunal, ~~[illegible]~~ une méchante tribune ~~[illegible]~~ qui ~~[illegible]~~ ~~gardé par un gendarme. La tribune est~~ réservée aux autorités et aux femmes choisies du département, par le président à qui appartient la police de l'audience.

Cette physionomie ~~morale~~ ~~de~~ ~~[illegible]~~ les tribunaux français ~~de~~ ~~[illegible]~~ les cours d'assises actuelles, ~~[illegible]~~ celle de la cour criminelle de Troyes.

Le Ministère public qui s'appelait alors

qui les gardent

garnie de douze chaises

réunit

entendus

vers l'autre

Nord de la salle

au dessus de la port. d'entrée

norm

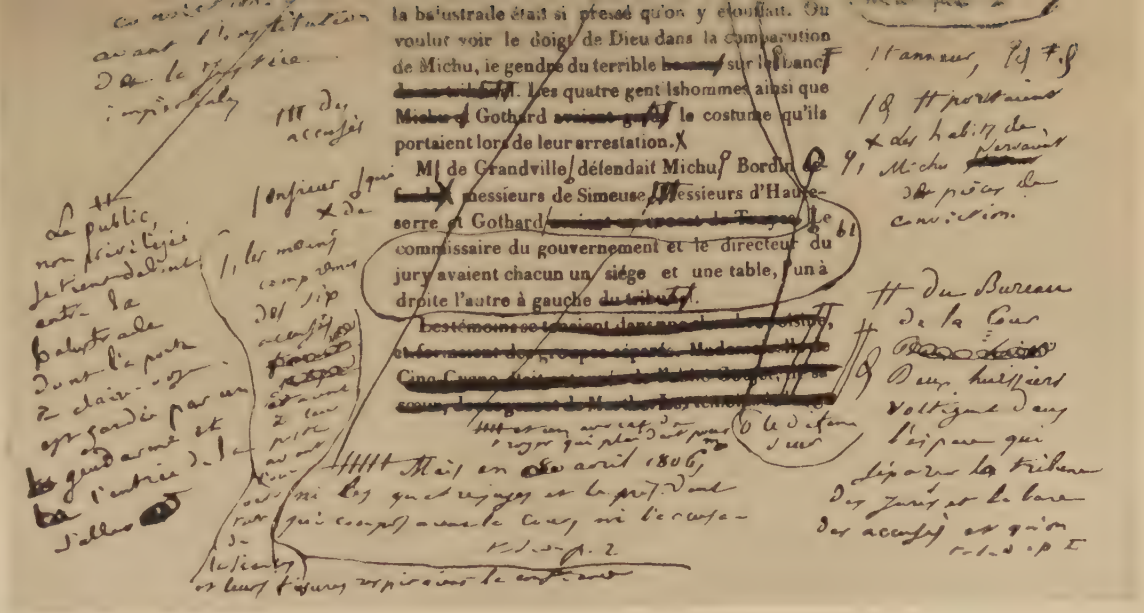
et

est

tribune où se trouve un banc pour

il est toujours

auprès


la balustrade était si pressé qu'on y étouffait. On voulut voir le doigt de Dieu dans la comparution de Michu, le gendre du terrible [illegible] sur le banc [illegible]. Les quatre gent Ishommes ainsi que Michu et Gothard [illegible] le costume qu'ils portaient lors de leur arrestation.

M. de Grandville défendait Michu, Bordin [illegible] messieurs de Simeuse, messieurs d'Hauteserre et Gothard [illegible]. Le commissaire du gouvernement et le directeur du jury avaient chacun un siége et une table, l'un à droite l'autre à gauche du tribunal.

Galley Proof of "La Ténébreuse Affaire," with Balzac's corrections

fate it is never to make themselves known, in a trade which is nothing if one is not known. Do they produce books? Well, then, they must bury them! They are the grave-diggers of the book trade!"

Hearing this, the other bestirred himself, bridled, spoke about a duel.

"Child!" exclaimed Balzac, "did one fight duels with Napoleon?"

Geneva! Geneva! That was all that sounded in his ears, whilst the other, on the staircase of the newspaper office, pursued him with abuse.

He went into drawing-rooms, but there he was like a man walking in his sleep. What was society to him? Geneva! He kept thinking of Geneva; he saw only Geneva!

And in January 1834 he finally left for Geneva.

He took with him in his trunk a magnificent suit of clothes, the golden buttons on which had been wrought by Gosselin, the foremost jeweller in Paris. He had engaged at the Pension Mirabaud, in the Eaux-Vives quarter, a little room where he thought that she would come as soon as he arrived: she would fall into his arms, through sheer inability to wait a moment longer.

Quite the reverse: he found her composed, anxious first of all to talk.

"What's the matter with you, dear Eva? Talk? But we no longer have thirst for words! We ——"

"I should like to know," she said, with a constrained smile, "how many women you are in love with at the same time as me? —" And behind her *lorgnette* she peered at him; the *lorgnette* enabled her to put the question with great coolness.

"What!" exclaimed Balzac. "It is outrageous! You have been listening to heaven knows what slanders!

But, Eva, there isn't a single man occupying the position that I do whose pedestal is not gnawed at by beastly creatures, which you have only to crush with your foot as soon as your eye catches sight of them."

"In that case," said Mme Hanska with composure, "what about the Marquise de Castries?"

"A woman I loathe!"

"And yet you make her presents."

"Darling, I am bringing you a terrible novel which I have just finished, and in which I have painted her perverted soul. She is a woman whom I thought that I was in love with: I was not in love with her; she provoked in me only evil passions! Eva, never, I swear, have I desired a woman with the ardour with which I desire you, in the happiness which kindness of heart and affection procure. It isn't an issue joined between us two. We are not two enemies of different sexes. We are the two halves of one soul, calling to each other, eager to unite and to clasp each other! I expect you at the Pension Mirabaud. When will you come there and realize that masterpiece which is the union of two creatures made for one another?"

He spoke with such passion that she closed her *lorgnette*. But she asked in a lower tone: "And how is Mme de Berny?"

"She is dying, Eva, she is dying! And, dying, gives us her blessing! She is a saint! Her name should be uttered only upon one's knees. Sweetheart, she does not know you, but already she loves you. Mme de Berny is a mother to me!"

The Countess was thoughtful and then asked: "What is her Christian name?"

"Do not ask me," Balzac answered, "what I am unwilling to tell you."

As he said that, she stretched out her arms to him and they kissed — a long kiss.

"Ah," he continued, "banish from your mind a host of thoughts which hurt you to think of, because you do not think them fairly. Your dear, analytical forehead is too analytical. Dear angel, believe about me only what I shall tell you. My life and all my past you shall learn of me. Do not be afraid: I have always had a horror of sordid love-affairs. You, yes, you are the noble woman, the superior intelligence, whom I have been waiting for, whom I have desired for the past fifteen years. I admire so enormously your strength of mind! I know only one woman in my country fit to compare with you: Mme de Staël; and the women who are my friends, Mme de Berny or Mme Carraud, have made me critical, upon my oath, in the matter of intelligence! Intelligence, and intelligence in love, that's what I have wanted to win. Fame, in reality, I do not care twopence about. I needed fame to attract your attention to me, you who were to be mine. But I live in you, through you, and for you! You are my dear guiding star."

"And you," replied Eva, "you represent France to me, passionate France and its great ideal: All or nothing! France! Surprising meeting and magnificent union of North and South! You have the uncompromising observation of the North and the fiery imagination of the South. What can I say, save that I love you, with my whole soul, with my whole heart ——"

"With your whole body, too, don't you, Eva? Come to-morrow! Come to-morrow!"

She came. It was a day of frenzy, passionate and unforgettable. It was destined to remain in their memories like the recollection of some terrific storm at night, the lurid flashes in which convey an impression of the in-

finite. She had come in a dress of grey cloth, which he was so fond of that forthwith she had to cut off a piece of the hem for him. He made her every kind of solemn protestation. She suffered him to wring from her every kind of promise. M. Hanski, despite his official title of husband, no longer counted. At the time when they were adoring each other, he was away at a dinner of the Alpine Club. He was already advanced in years and slowly dying: nature, of its own accord, gets rid of what comes in its way. — And Mme Hanska would become Mme Honoré de Balzac. Ah! at the very idea, he declared to her: "Darling, beloved darling, I love you like a lover of the Middle Ages!" Finally, to consecrate that wonderful day upon which she had become his wife, he drew out of his frock-coat a bundle of sheets, his novel *Ne touchez pas à la hache*, and there, before her and for her, he wrote the date upon it: *Pré-l'Évêque, 24th January 1834*. In truth, it was chiefly for himself, against the Marquise. Besides the Marquise would be no wiser than Mme Hanska; but that story of an irreligious woman denying herself to the best of men assumed for him the appearance of a secret revenge which he relished, signed as it was at the place and with the date where and on which a divine woman had yielded to his embrace. And there was more: it had been God's will that this enormous happiness should befall him at Geneva, the city in which he had endured the acutest suffering. *Pré-l'Évêque* — the words were sufficient to give even the Marquise something to think about — if indeed she was capable of thinking at all.

The fortnight which Balzac spent at Geneva was ecstatic and fragrant, despite some moments of panic occasioned by M. Hanski, who did not always find it so convenient to be away at a banquet. They showed,

however, almost devilish invention in cramming into two weeks as many meetings as two months could hold. Where was it that they did not meet? How they laughed and cried at the Villa Diodati, where the great Byron had loved! And how ravishing the Countess was every day, twice a day, in her fleece dressing-gown, which she had brought so as to undress at the Pension Mirabaud!

After many embraces they delighted often in eating and drinking at a little table in their room.

"How I *do* love you," he would say to her, "who give yourself with such sincerity and happiness!"

"How I do love *you*," she would reply, "who are so kind and great! — Only, beloved of my heart, if you want to please me, don't put your knife into your mouth!"

He burst out laughing. "Does it grate on you so much?"

And she would reply, rather tartly: "Your ladies Carraud and de Berny might have told you that before me."

Conceit? Jealousy? Coldness of heart? Suddenly offended, he asked himself the question for a moment. But his wings were too strong to keep him from flying, and the bird that flies in the high heavens no longer notices the dust of the earth.

But none the less the fact remained that he discovered in her at Geneva what he had not noticed at Neuchâtel: the constant predominance over the heart of a calculating mind, and the capacity, in the clarity of vision which never left her, of displaying a coldblooded cunning, which provoked him one day to exclaim: "O women, women, how much injustice is in your characters!" In the course of an idle discussion he had shown some warmth and had succeeded in answering her

abundantly, with as much truth as goodness of heart, with an argument which clinched the matter. Even before he had finished, with swift intuition, she felt herself overcome and, just as he finished speaking, delivered this cutting remark: "Don't rasp with your voice: it is excessively unpleasant."

He returned to Paris with the painful conviction that woman is inferior to man. The journey was irksome to him. He thought Burgundy tedious. And although his *Études de mœurs au dix-neuvième siècle* were bought from him for 27,000 francs, which was, according to him, an unheard-of price, he set to work again without enjoyment.

He was in need of a distraction. Paris offered every kind. He went back to Buisson, to whom he gave considerable orders, for which he did not pay, swearing all the time that he would. — Clearly, he should have discharged the bill which was already owing! "But the publishers are fierce, my dear Buisson!" (They were so only with respect to his expenditure.) "Now — a man, like me, can't very well help spending, my dear Buisson! Ever since *Eugénie Grandet* the eyes of the world are upon Balzac! So my next frock-coat must be a dream!" Although he was growing stout and the shape of his body did not readily lend itself to a tasteful cut, Buisson set his wits to work and did his best, because Buisson liked him. He liked him so well as to offer him a room above his shop, at the corner of the rue de Richelieu and the boulevards, "in the heart of the smithy," as Balzac used to say. "Right in the fire! I shall work above you as nowhere else! I shall glow to white heat!" The excuse made an impression upon the soft-hearted tailor, but it was still an excuse for fleeing from his creditors who hung upon the door-bell at the rue Cassini. Men devoid

of imagination, for whom two and two make four, they would end by making it impossible for him to live in the apartments which the tranquillity of the Observatory gardens had hitherto made fragrant for him! These were reinforced by members of the National Guard, who were continually on the look-out for him, and from whom he kept receiving warning notices and threats of imprisonment. These intimations, which were often followed by an actual hue and cry, which he would escape either by leaving his house or going on a journey, but which was described to him by his neighbours or his servants, roused him to fits of frenzy in which he raved against Louis-Philippe, the king of shopkeepers! No! No! Never would he take his turn at sentry-go. Never! Was it understood? Balzac with a pouch! Why not a bugle? Did he ask Marshal Lobau to write his novels? The Government was a pack of fools! What a despicable time in which to live! But he would stand up to them — in the first place by forgetting all about them. Forward! And to work! "My debts," he kept thinking, "are as nothing in comparison with the enormous sums represented by all the subjects which I have got in my head. — Really there will have been only four men in the century: Napoleon, who had the army in his blood; Cuvier, who took the earth for his wife; O'Connell, who was the incarnation of a people; and Balzac, with a whole society in his brain!" But, as he kept on saying every day to Buisson, such a man should be in real life just as he was in his work. Doomed to create, everywhere and always, he should lead the fashion and not follow it. Balzac allowed his hair to grow: only let people see him and talk about him, and before six months were out, the dandies would be wearing their hair long! By the colour of his clothes, by his opera-

glasses, which had been specially made by the Observatory optician, above all by his cane, which was the only one of its kind in Paris, he never ceased experimenting, innovating, and inventing. His cane was a lover's notion. Mme Hanska used to wear round her neck a little gold chain, ending in a golden acorn picked out with tiny turquoises. One day that he craved from her a ribbon, her handkerchief, some memento which she had worn, she gave him this chain. He had no sooner returned to Paris than he wanted to show it off, and to wear it, so that it should be clear to everyone that he lived at the sign of love. He made Lecointe, jeweller and goldsmith, whom with generous magniloquence he dubbed a rival of Benvenuto Cellini, mount a knob, set with turquoises, upon a strong flexible Malacca, from which the dearly loved little chain gracefully dangled. In truth, his friends thought the complete article rather mawkish, more suited to a little girl on her first communion day than to a man of genius, but Balzac was proud of his lucky finding and displayed it in the park, in restaurants, and in the theatres, and never let it out of his sight, even at table, in case someone should play a practical joke upon him. In the celebrities' box at the Opéra, whither in his vanity he had allowed himself to be taken, amidst a crowd of eccentric and rowdy young men, he displayed his cane as though it were a sceptre, and all the *lorgnettes* in the house converged upon it. In the lobbies he felt himself admired. Women wrote to him and accosted him. He gave at the Rocher de Cancale restaurant, and in his house, dinners fit for a king! Rossini was invited to one and returned home dazzled by the quality of the courses and the high spirits of the host. His debts simultaneously rose so high as to make him dizzy, but he had too much strength to lose his equilib-

rium. *Ne touchez pas à la hache* had just appeared. And he was astonished at himself. What audacity! What depth! Nobody had ever spoken of love like that before. Neither words nor the thing itself had any terrors for him, and he was able to express everything, thanks to a moving eloquence which carried the reader along: he felt the force of it himself when he re-read his work. The better to test one last time that woman of the inscrutable heart, that Marquise de Castries, to whom he owed so much of his suffering and, it might be, so much of his genius, a fiendish idea occurred to him and prevailed in his mind. Supposing he were to go and read that book to her? Yes, yes, it must be done! A woman who does harm, who thought she had tied to her strings a man of great talent, must be made to understand how he can set himself free by doing good, for a masterpiece is a good work. Thereupon he ran panting to the rue du Bac. It was four o'clock. How many times he had arrived about that time, heart-sick for love! When he inquired if the Marquise was at home, such a flood of memories streamed into his mind that he felt almost as weak as he had done before. She was at home. He went in. She uttered no cry; she did not throw herself into his arms. And yet he remembered her letter, every phrase of which was a choking sob. Now she was quite composed, entirely mistress of herself, with her familiar air of self-conceit. With a supreme flash of goodness he said to himself: "Perhaps she has cried too much! Perhaps she has no tears left! O woman, fearful woman, still unknown! Where is the man who would not be wretched before her?" Well, he, for one, at all events would not be wretched. He did not want to be. And he told her in the tone of a soldier going into battle why he had come — and that he wanted to read her — that

— the sheets he had with him — his latest book. She smiled and was quite willing. Ever that insincere smile which seemed so sincere. — He would overcome her and reduce her, he was sure. He began to read, read in a scolding voice. She fanned herself; she indicated with a movement of the head that it was very good. With fire in his eyes he replied: "Wait! You shall see! You shall see yourself."

She did see herself, heard herself speak, recognized herself, and smiled again. He read with such ardour that he was himself affected and suddenly exclaimed: "Isn't it fine?"

She said in a frail voice: "Oh yes — and very well written. — And it's really such a pity that I have invited some friends. But here is His Lordship — my confessor, and my doctor as well, and the Marquise de La Bourdonnaye, all arriving together!"

Balzac rose up. He shuffled his sheets together and tried to conceal them. He was crimson with rage. He looked round for an opening, for a trap-door. He felt like throwing himself into the fire! — then like killing all these people! then — his honest heart, thumping against his breast, told him simply that forgiveness was the best course of all and that he would be avenged by his readers, who would judge that woman.

He took his leave, left, flew to Mme de Berny in the rue d'Enfer. It was night. He found her struggling for breath, at that time which is painful to the sick. With the same faith in magnetism as his father, he tried with his hand, slowly and softly, with his loving, kind hand, to restore warmth and vitality in equipoise to that poor, weary heart and those worn-out lungs.

"Dear woman's breasts, which I have loved so much," said he, "trust to me! You know, sweetheart,

that Christ our Lord worked His miracles no otherwise than by the imposition of His holy hands. The hands and the soul — there is our greatest help. Let me make you better — I implore you."

But thinking that he was doing her good, he merely did her harm. She stopped him — and forced herself to smile. She did not want him to see her suffering, and she was suffering infinite pain. She knew that he had spent a fortnight at Geneva. Her heart told her what had happened there, and it was in vain that her mind replied that it was well so; she was too much of a woman to acquiesce in it. But she would conceal her anguish from him. And, on his side, he endeavoured to hide the sorrow he felt at seeing her going; for there could be no more doubt: it was all up with her. Her poor wasted face! Oh! — He began to think of the house at Villeparisis and how she appeared in the drawing-room on the 11th of June 1821. He felt his heart rent. He felt himself about to sob. But she looked at him and he said to her: "You are better! Oh yes, yes! There is colour in your face to-day! Acquire zest for life, my well-beloved. It will return by slow degrees. And I, in a few days' time, will come back to tell you that I find you quite yourself again."

What terrible thoughts ran in his head as he walked in the street! Love and Death! The former just a cheat, for everything inevitably belonged to the latter! What he had seen at the Grande Chartreuse, monks in their cells, with skulls near their study tables and benches for prayer, was the true and worthy life, in relation with creation.

Chilled by the idea of death, he walked in the shadow. Suddenly he noticed that he was holding a parcel. What on earth was it? Oh, yes, a manuscript which he was

taking to a binder, one Spachmann, whose dexterity he had experienced. It was for his dear Eva. He had determined to have bound for her a book which she would like in the piece of grey cloth from the dress he was so fond of. She glided so softly across the floor of the room at Pré-l'Évêque! He thought he heard her coming in. Pension Mirabaud! Days of madness! Memories of high excitements! "Eva! My darling Eva!" He spoke the words aloud. He collided with a woman passing by and forgot to apologize. He was mad with love.

5

M. de Margonne, the owner of the château and the estate of Saché, in the valley of the Indre, received, one morning towards the end of September 1834, a letter from Balzac. It contained only a few lines. It was a request by Balzac to the man whom he called his "saviour" for hospitality once again. Balzac alleged that he was worn out with work. His doctor ordered Saché for him. He was leaving that very day. And he ended as follows: "If I am lucky enough to come upon you with business at Tours, I will take advantage of your trap."

"It's idiotic!" exclaimed M. de Margonne. "He is already at Tours this very moment and —— Jean! Jean! Harness quickly!"

Mme de Margonne intervened. "Don't go and tire out your horses to arrive too late!"

"I shall find him on the road."

"There are two roads. Supposing he takes the other one!"

"It's frightfully hot! Six leagues on foot ——"

"The argument applies just as well to the horses."

II

M. de Margonne gave in and said to Jean: "Then don't harness!"

Jean poked his head into the stable and said, in a jeering tone, to the two horses who were eating their heads off: "False alarm! It isn't for to-day either. Patience!"

All this while, Balzac, with his pack on his back under a scorching sun, was striding along, perspiring and singing. He had just spent a fearful August in Paris. He had just firmly grasped his theme of the *Recherche de l'absolu*, which more than any other necessitated quiet recollection, concentration of all his energies, and interior silence. He had grown accustomed to working by night. "Everything is asleep," he used to say, "even the flies," which used to exasperate him in the day-time. And for thirty nights on end he had struggled with his plan, so as to get it all exactly right. After that, he had felt such an exhaustion of body and such a numbness of mind that he had called in Dr. Nacquart, his physician and friend. The latter, ever worthy in character and in expression, tried to frighten him. "Be careful! It may become very serious."

"In what sense serious?" said Balzac.

"Yours is an inhuman mode of life: you may drop all of a sudden!"

"Drop how?" said Balzac.

"Of a stroke. No more joking. Your book is finished, isn't it?"

"Doctor," said Balzac, "I'll just explain to you. I have a brain in two compartments. In the first is the book that I am writing. In the second compartment, behind, is another which is writing itself! I have just written a scientific novel which necessitated enormous research. I had to consult two members of the Academy

of Sciences, who taught me chemistry; and every day I had to go and see, with my manuscript or my proof, Gay-Lussac at the Arsenal and Chevreul at the Museum. Every time I have been to see Chevreul, the book in the second compartment, which is to be called *Le Père Goriot*, began to stir and that meant: "Go and take a turn in the rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève!" And so I would go there. I never went there without finding out someone or something fresh; with the result that at the end of a month the book in the second compartment is so enriched that it is ready, ready to emerge and to be written down. And it is peremptory. It clamours to be admitted into the first compartment. If I do not yield to its insistence, if I let it go, it may be a book lost!"

"That's all very well," said Dr. Nacquart, "but ——"

"It can't be done!" exclaimed Balzac. "It will be my best book!"

"You won't be able to do it now," said Dr. Nacquart, "or you will be a dead man. I'm warning you!"

In his black frock-coat, with his austere face surmounting his white tie, he presented an imposing appearance. He insisted upon absolute rest. The country; sleep; talk only with animals.

"Or the owners of châteaux!" exclaimed Balzac, bursting out laughing. "Doctor, I give way!"

He wrote to M. de Margonne, and left Paris two hours after his letter. Then, not finding any conveyance at Tours, he set out on foot for Saché. It was hotter even than in the height of the harvest. There are some days in September which are scorching in Touraine. The sky is blue beyond hope of any cloud. There is not a breath in the air. The road is blinding to the eyes.

"Heavens!" said Balzac, as he emerged from the

town of his birth and took the road which goes across the plains of Charlemagne, "I'm in for a steam bath! But it will have the merit of exuding out of me all watery elements, which are dangerous in the building of a monument."

He was delighted to perspire, to tramp along, and to talk to every living soul he met by the way. "Lord, what a wonderful country you've got! There's nothing like it in the whole world! May I taste these grapes? It is ideal under such a sky to eat such delicacies! Ah! Now I understand why Leonardo da Vinci came to die amongst you!"

He arrived at Saché, and his clothes were white with dust, whilst his face was red, to the tip of his nose, with grape juice. Instead of tiring him out, his six leagues had roused him to an incredible pitch of excitement. His imagination was as swollen as his veins. Radiant, talkative, and dripping, with coarse shoes on his feet and clad in the most extraordinary get-up, in which he was rather tied up than dressed, he was a source of wonder to the coachman and the cook, of terror to Mme de Margonne, whose mind was all for her floors. But he was in no hurry to make his way into the house. Outside, under the trees, squatting first on the grass and finally in the shade, his face shining, his eyes full of visions, his first duty was to sing the beauty of Touraine. It almost made him drunk! Vouvray, nestling amidst its vineyards with its glittering vine leaves, gave him the impression of a country-side all gold. Rochecorbon and its tower were Toledo! Tours and its cathedral, Venice rising from the womb of the waters! — M. de Margonne had sat down and, having a mind like an unruffled pond, over which no wind ever stirred, looked at Balzac in amazement, saying to himself:

II

"Where on earth does he find all that he talks about? Where in the world has he seen all he describes? What a fanciful creature!" And the last epithet expressed a deal of mistrust. But Balzac laughed and sprawled upon the grass, and related over again that he had come from Tours marching like a soldier to the rhythm of the vine growers hammering their barrels in their cellars. What elaborate preparation for the vintage! Wine, one of the two noblest food-stuffs! Illustrious district, privileged and sealed by God! How proud he was that he had been born there! He discovered, once more, all his love for it. This land of such serene appearance inspired his enthusiasm and the lyrical mood. Confronting Touraine, he experienced the same passionate feelings as before "La Gioconda" (and at the mention of Gioconda he thought of Mme Hanska, of her forehead and her smile). That appearance of self-restraint and tranquillity concealed an energy which the kings of France had quickly perceived. And what blades the kings of France had been! How was it possible for a man crossing Touraine not to be legitimist, even though Touraine had been spoiled by the spirit of the Revolution? And of that jewel the pearl was Saché! An ideal spot! What a home for the mind! Always cool of an evening, because of the Indre and the great woods. After the stifling heat of the day a man felt himself in paradise; the sun had raged in all its royal glory, and the melancholy experience of seeing it sink and disappear was unknown! There is no more dangerous spectacle than a lovely sunset, in which the activity of the mind becomes lost and disintegrated like the light. In Saché, at all events, thanks to a thick curtain of trees, the garden, the house, and the lawns boldly retreated into the shadow, which favours courageous thinking, and the lingering fires of the last

hour, in which weak minds delight to speculate upon death, were unknown. One should never think of death, which gathers you to itself when it wills. Everyone has his appointed task here below, and not overmuch time in which to achieve it.

As he went on in this strain, he espied the cook, whose head was thrust through the kitchen window and who was listening at a distance, stock-still. The sight of him redoubled his spirits. Like all men of intelligence, he was crazy about simple people.

"My friends," he continued, "this year I have killed two arm-chairs under me! The second collapsed with the crash of lightning at the moment when I was writing the most affecting page of my latest book! A proof that, like the ploughman or the harvester, the artist toils with his whole body at the time when the mind, in the fire, is forging a tremendous work. Dr. Nacquart told me: 'You have struggled like a lion. You must stay a lion. Leave for Saché, and when you are there, live like Nebuchadnezzar, in the shape of a beast!' I agreed. But would you?"

Mme de Margonne pulled a wry face.

"I couldn't go on. I was like the mouth of a volcano smeared with blood. Two baths a day could not give me rest! And you can see how white my hair has grown. Not to mention this corporation which I have got on me, and which has grown, upon my soul, by dint of conceiving. That scum which men call journalists has begun to make fun of it. France is rich in caricaturists, but poor in poets. At any rate — you are my salvation! I had a very severe pain in the side, coming from the liver, it appears. At the mere sight of you all, and the breath of the air of Touraine, I feel it no more! Thank you! All that I suffer from now is an inflammation of

the brain!" (M. de Margonne agreed with an inclination of the head, and rather sadly.) "But on the other hand I've got a penphobia, and an inkphobia which will cure me again! Besides I can rest upon my laurels. For everything is going so splendidly with me that the Widow Béchet, my publisher, has displayed a generosity without parallel in the history of publishing! For the second edition of *Scènes de la vie privée* — which I am rewriting on proofs, of course — (at thirty-five I am not the same man as I was at thirty, and one must always adapt the work which one has done to the man one has become!) that excellent woman is herself bearing the expense of four thousand francs' worth of corrections! And why? Because she feels that we are going to make a fortune!"

Thereupon the cook drew in his head again and said to the kitchen-maid: "We shall get our tips. It won't be like last time!"

And Mme de Margonne, who was as avaricious as an ant, cheered up, all of a sudden, and remarked: "You must have earned enormous sums with *Eugénie Grandet*, which contains some charming pages."

There was everything in what she said to exasperate Balzac. *Eugénie Grandet* once more, to be sure! That was the only book of his that anybody knew! And "*charming* pages," once more the ridiculous compliment! Awful old Grandet charming! Big Nanon charming! He rose to his feet and said: "Charming, your house is!"

"Hem! Not very cheerful," said M. de Margonne.

"Neither was Molière, for that matter," said Balzac.

"Do you know that people have come to see your room?" said Mme de Margonne in a rasping voice.

Ah, there was a piece of news to flatter his vanity.

"And what did they say?" he asked delightedly.

"They felt the bed," she replied, "and discovered that it sagged."

He understood very well that such an observation proceeded from herself: it was one more covert dig. He was unabashed, and retorted: "And so I am famous and I give my fame to your house! It well deserves it! What a beautiful house it is! What a splendid French appearance!"

Continuing his tramp, as though he had been on the broad highway, he made the round of it in a rhythmical step: "One, two! One, two! I won't be a national guard elsewhere than at Saché! One, two! Look at the remains of those rafters! It was a terrific stronghold! Folk slit each other's throats here to protect your property. Besides, the north side of your house is grandiose. Sad little windows, set in a grey wall, above a damp ditch: it's the very aspect of war! — Whereas the southern side —— Come along with me."

"Oh, we know our property," said Mme de Margonne.

"Madame, you know it only as owners," said Balzac, "and that doesn't mean anything! Only poets have real knowledge. Because they see not only what is in front of their eyes, but the past and the future as well. Come along with me! Your north side is the past, the fourteenth century and all its battles. Jeanne d'Arc's soldiers thrust their helmeted heads through your windows and there were the bodies of dead English warriors under your rafters. But again, look at your south side: it is peace and the future. Look at those great casement-windows with the tufa borders, of soft stone of Touraine. How jolly the roof is! How beautiful! How nice! What sweet reasonableness, what intimacy, what a warm

welcome! You have no children, but there will be children here. I tell you. Children will be brought up here some day. It is written in the book! Don't shake your head, madame, I implore you. I am a poet and by the same token a prophet! And the children brought up at Saché will be delightful, full of good sense and truth! And therefore I am going up to my room by the tower staircase, the steps of which, alas, are being worn away — although it is praiseworthy to set one's foot in the footsteps of one's fathers. Ah, without my father I should be nothing at all! I have inherited everything from him. He dictates when I write. He was absent-minded and indolent; and that was why he produced hardly anything during his lifetime. I, on the other hand, am all concentrated and full of courage, and I am determined to do my work — but it is at my father's dictation. — That spiral staircase, so neat and charming, turning round in that white stone, affects me as much as any staircase of Diane de Poitiers, or any other by which the conspirators escaped, after murdering the prince. It's a very magnificent thing, dear friends, that staircase of yours! And I am stopping at the first floor, before going up to my room, because I want to see the drawing-room immediately."

"One would think that you hadn't been here for thirty years," remarked M. de Margonne; "whereas only a few months ago ——"

"To-day I'm arriving in a quite exceptional state," retorted Balzac. "Now I understand why I liked everything I liked confusedly in my childhood."

"You were talking about the drawing-room, not about your childhood."

"Forgive me! Will you allow me thoroughly to explain myself? I am not of the Touraine, I've got south-

ern blood in my veins; the tumult of the Garonne courses in me, not the sloth of the Loire. But I was born on the banks of the Loire: it was upon the Loire that I opened my eyes for the first time. If I had not been born in Touraine, I should love the province, but peaceably; that is to say, I should be a poor lover; I should be vain on its account, but not for love! There never was an inhabitant of Touraine who knew what love was! In short, I love the Loire with all the passionate ardour of a man who is destined to love the Garonne. It is something unexpected and splendid. Very well, then, this passionate ardour, which may be called by another name, poetical vision, to-day I am bringing it into your drawing-room, friends, because there occurs a day in the life of every man when it is realized. Nowhere in France, mark my words, have I seen a setting fit to compare with this "company room," as they used to say in the last century. That gilded drapery, hung at the top from green lions' heads can have satisfied only a Shaksperian soul. Here was enacted a tragedy like *Othello*, or a comedy like *The Taming of the Shrew*."

"Come, come!" exclaimed M. de Margonne.

"There is no possible doubt about it!" said Balzac. "And if to-day there are two portraits of abbés hanging on the wall, it is a sign of pacification and forgiveness. So there! Now let's go up to my room! Let's get close to your roof, which is like a face, marked and moulded by time, by wind and rain, the high passions of the seasons. What a magnificent thing it is for the heart, my dear lady, to live under such a roof! — Ah ha! Madame de Margonne hasn't followed us? — Do I bore her? — She finds me too talkative! — But you, dear friend, can put up with my telling you once again how fond I am of my

room. Why, the very sight of the door is enough to give me a feeling of piety! How unpretentious and dignified it is, with its Louis XV moulding! — I always feel as though I were going into a cell — which is the most beautiful thing in all the world! But a cell in which a nun would have lived before I came, and not a monk. And the holy woman inspires me, every time I come here to work. Small, unassuming, tiles on the floor, and a dark paper on the wall, my room is ready prepared for meditation! And it opens on — on a forest! For it isn't a wood: the word is too paltry. Everything at Saché is great. There is a cluster of age-old oaks there, which are regal. And we are on a level with their tops — that is to say, up to their crowns; so far we feel that we are kings ourselves. I know nothing which uplifts me so much as my room; I am midway between the sky and the earth; I share equally in both, like fire and the wind. Ah, what a touching thing it is to come back here!"

"Well, my dear Honoré — I am pleased for your sake," grunted M. de Margonne. — "They've brought you up water. — I'll leave you to wash and rest yourself. And the bell, as usual, will let you know when supper is ready."

When he had gone out Balzac said: "The worthy man! A noble name, a magnificent estate. But he hasn't got the slightest understanding of what matters in life. It's the fate of nine tenths of human beings. The misery of the human race! Whereas I, when I come in here and see once more that recess with its pink Jouy canvas, like the complexion of a young girl, that good, sacred oil-lamp, that simple honest chest of drawers, that arm-chair made to dream in, I feel, in the peace of everything, how deep down I shall be able to go into my own soul

and the soul of my ancestors. I am going to write a masterpiece! — and maybe two! Write! And what about Dr. Nacquart? And what about rest?"

Bah! That forced tramp had done him so much good that perhaps he was cured. — At any rate one would see! —

For three days he exercised compulsion upon himself, he went out walking.

"Should you like to come and see my tenants at La Tachellerie?" M. de Margonne would ask.

"I'm going straightway," Balzac would reply.

"Should you like to come and fish at the red mill?" M. de Margonne would ask.

"Let's go!" Balzac would reply.

But although he set off walking by the side of his host, what the two pedestrians saw was as widely different as their respective statures. One, Balzac, was short; the other, his folk said, stood six feet clear. Against these physical disparities, M. de Margonne had an eye for only what was mean and petty, whereas Balzac magnified everything he saw. If they walked across fields under the azure sky, M. de Margonne would lament the state of the soil, and Balzac admire the sky. He would think of Mme Hanska, who was at Vienna, and in that dazzling blue would scan the horizon for the coming of a pigeon, bringing from her a green branch in its beak. If they sat down on the banks of the Indre to spy a pike, M. de Margonne gave all his attention to fish and bait and line; Balzac would see the deep life of the river, the whole course of which would appear to him in a vision. And it would be M. de Margonne who would catch the pike, and on that account commend himself for his own good sense.

"Our poor friend," he would say to Mme de Mar-

gonne in the evening, "did well to choose a useless trade, for he doesn't know anything about anything."

Balzac used to make his hosts especially fume when, after coming home, he would start off praising before them the beauty of the landscapes which he had seen. Each vied with the other in correcting his mistakes; and he would stare at them open-mouthed, not at his own mistakes, but at their mania for diminishing and disparaging everything. Why? Such was the force of imagination in his case that it would immediately substitute the creation of his mind for the landscape which his eyes perceived. And so it came about that one evening, in the presence of guests, he had the joy of believing and of saying lyrically that from the country round Saché the Château d'Azay, that diamond cut in many facets, was to be seen at the same time as the white course of the Loire. Thereupon merriment and derisory laughter.

"The Loire! Why, it's behind the slope! You must be able to see right through!" exclaimed M. de Margonne.

"Azay! If we were birds, perhaps we should be able to discover it!" said Mme de Margonne.

Then he would gaze at them sadly: "Just listen to what you yourselves say, I beg of you! You say that it would be sufficient to have the eyes of a magician and wings. Very well, then ——"

"You haven't got them any more than we, being of the same stuff, as far as we know," they hissed together.

"Excuse me!" said he, with great seriousness; "I have what takes the place of everything and allows everything to be seen: I have love!"

What did he mean? They pulled a wry face.

"If you were in love like me," he said again, "you would see everything that I see, because I want to see it!"

And he went up to his cell, facing the royal trees, and came down again — only at the end of three days!

Yes, abruptly he had flown into a passion. The atmosphere of his surroundings was choking him! He felt comfortable only by himself, in the company of the characters which his brain had created and the women whom his heart loved. And he was going to work on behalf of the women when he endowed his characters with life. Dr. Nacquart was affectionate and devoted, but a clear-headed patient has no better doctor than himself. After three days' calm, he was entirely rested. The few stupid remarks which had so nettled him restored to him all his zest for work. He carefully surveyed the task which was to be undertaken: it was wonderful! In the first compartment of his mind, *Le Père Goriot*, which so far had been only sketched out, was calling out to be fashioned and perfected, clamouring to be made to scream, to suffer anguish, and to die. And behold, in the second compartment, a magnificent story was appearing, increasing, and asserting itself. It sprang out of the collision of two passions. In going into raptures over that land of Touraine his heart had been stirred by the same impulses as when it was filled with love, and suffered because some dear face such as Mme de Berny's, rather than Mme Hanska's, for Mme de Berny was French, was not present to give life to that countryside, which had been created for her. For what is nature without the life of a human being? Nature is intended for men and women. Only science without intelligence can pretend the reverse. The intelligence, even denied the assistance of science, experiences this truth. — So Balzac, in his destitution, had only one remedy: once more to create what was not there; to place the beloved woman in the beloved country, the chaste heart in the

chosen land, the lily in the lovely valley. Ah! he had the title already, before beginning the book: in his piety, in self-communion, he had just discovered it, by an impulse of the soul: *Le Lys dans la vallée*. How wonderful! The whole story would be pervaded by that whiteness, that coolness. It would be an oasis, a spring underneath the palms, in the scorching desert which a work of observation is, in which all society, its interests and its views, pass in procession. And so the book would be a rest even for its author. Rest in the pit, that went without saying! For once again he would have to work night and day, twenty-one hours out of the twenty-four; but what was that when the mind was unceasingly refreshed by love, by the most affectionate visions, and the sweetest — anguish?

Sitting in front of his window, with only the heaven and its clouds before him, for he had to lean out to catch the billowing of the trees, he began to dream about a farm which he had just admired on the slope of a hill, above the Indre on the other side from Saché, opposite Pont-de-Ruan, a farm more beautiful than a château, for it was a place of unkept assignation, one of those gay residences of an age in which women were loved, and men knew how to capture them. It had exquisite Henry II windows, so graceful that a man's heart could never forget them, and it would have been impossible to contemplate it, to wander round about it, to dally in the vale which most delightfully followed a deep, winding course just behind it, without thinking of love. There he would make his heroine live in all her sensibility, the divine creature! He would cross the Indre in one leap of his imagination, fly to her, tell her how much he loved her, and enfold her in his love. She had a husband, she had children; she would resist, as in

fact she had resisted for nearly a year. — But in his dream she was dying of it, as she was dying at La Bouleaunière, less chaste to be sure, but as lovely in soul and as affecting. The fact is that woman fights a duel with man, and woman, poor thing, never wins. If she doesn't prevail, she dies. If she isn't happy, she dies. And he saw her in her death agony, he followed the funeral procession going down from the wonderful house, crossing the green Indre at the red mill, at the very spot where he had looked at everything, seen everything, loved everything, while M. de Margonne, blind and deaf, was matching his skill with a pike. A hidden retreat; a place lost in the heart of trees and reeds, amidst the bursting spray of a waterfall; a dear place for daydreams, for avowals and for kisses, which would see that coffin go by. Finally, he was letting her down into the earth, her, his mistress, who was not yet dead, but on the point of expiring, at the foot of the old, old church of Saché, in a little graveyard of roses and honeysuckle, hanging over the road like a garden, right in front of the château of M. de Margonne. Merely to imagine such scenes, the very pathos of which gave him a tender ecstasy, moved him to tears. And so he felt that into that book he should be able to put his finest feelings, and that it would be one of his triumphs.

He rose up; he felt himself almost in a frenzy of energy.

"When a man's name is Balzac," he said aloud, "two syllables like two pistol-shots — he cannot but have a temper of steel!"

Once more he thought of Dr. Nacquart, and as though to make his excuses to the doctor: "I'll dedicate that book to him. The dear soul! He has well deserved it!"

Then, as in his artless, but crafty, southern imagina-

tion petty calculations of self-interest were always tacked on to the triumphant successes of art, he thought also that it would be a marvellous theme to appease the jealousy of Mme Hanska. She would wonder if this drama of chastity was not after all true, and he would enjoy the benefit of her doubt. There was every inducement, therefore, to harness himself to this great work before any other. He was in need of money, as he always was, but his need was still more pressing than usual. He was terrified at the near approach of the due dates of certain bills, although his house in Paris was undiscoverable, or at any rate he thought so, as he took lodgings under assumed names, fled from the rue Cassini to stay with Buisson, told servants and porters, who always swore that they did not know the name of M. de Balzac, to say that he was not at home. Fortunately the *Lys* would have an enormous sale and bring him in vast sums of money, being a book glorifying women; women readers would be sure to cry over it as he had cried himself! Finally, it was a magnificent answer to the critics who, in a recent onslaught, had once more condemned his work, alleging the immorality of his heroines. What scum! What fools! Or what bad faith! He had already answered by reckoning up himself the number of virtuous and guilty women in his books which had been published up to that day: thirty-eight of the former against twenty of the latter! But the *Lys* would be his conclusive answer, the proof that the work in which he was engaged formed a whole, with two sides to it like life itself, and that, after having depicted guilt, he knew how to describe the virgin and ideal soul!

Work! Work! He felt that he had the power to write out in two nights, and perhaps one, the substance of that — hymn! For, better than a novel, it would be a

prose canticle in honour of a woman who was an angel, a marvellous blossom grown in a garden fragrant with Christian virtues, and like the heavenly pictures of Leonardo it would have for background the poetical landscape of that valley of the Indre, where everything was radiantly simple.

But the better to see both the woman and the country-side, he had first to cut himself off from the world. — It was still daylight. He drew the blinds. "Farewell, enchanting valley! You give my eyes too many happy distractions!" And he lit his candles. He took out pen and ink and penwiper, which consisted of a fragment of the violet dress which Eva Hanska had worn for their first meeting, when, on the promenade by the lake of Neuchâtel, he had had the revelation of what the happiness of life was. He sat down. He listened. All was silent as in the cloister or the grave. He felt himself to be outside humanity and murmured with pride: "This time they will not judge me; they will not be able to, I shall be so far above them!" He took up his pen. — The work he was about to engage on would be so close to his heart that he would have to cast it in a more intimate shape than the others. — So his story would be a confidence, made to one woman concerning another — to the Countess concerning *La Dilecta* — and he would not have the courage, in his emotion, to mask his character. He would say "I"; he would say "me": he would tell his story in his own person. He leaned his head upon his hands. He could see himself on the road between Tours and Saché, in the blinding heat, running to her. He could see himself in the night, nothing stirring, not a breath of wind, under the stars, crossing the Indre, running to her. He could see her in a drawing-room, working with her beautiful hands and surrounded

by children. He could see her on a terrace, with her beautiful face full of compassion and affection, underneath the trees; it was autumn; a golden leaf fell upon her white dress. He could see her in a dark avenue of oak-trees; he had taken hold of her arm; he was speaking to her passionately; he was imploring her to allow him to take one kiss. Oh God, he was dizzy! He was fainting almost as much as she. — Footsteps — her husband. He could see her husband, minutely pictured him with his grey face, the colour of ashes, and his meannesses, his fits of temper, his morose heart. And he could see her children, her eldest daughter, beautiful as herself, already desirable, the picture of virtue like her mother, and of filial piety. — At the very moment those two words emerged, suddenly the two daughters of Père Goriot reappeared in his imagination, and in the striking form which they had already assumed, with the precision of two types, of two symbols, strongly created. They would be amongst the masterly figures on the monument, like the father between the two. Of the father he would make an imperishable portrait. The father would never, never be forgotten. He would grow into a legend. Even those who would never read the book would be acquainted with the human drama, the tearing passion represented in those two words: *Père Goriot*. And that would all be due to the glaring truth of the portraiture and the impassioned tone of the story.

He had laid on his desk, at the same time as his pen, a parcel of proofs: the first proof of *Le Père Goriot*, which he had brought from Paris in his bag, along with shoes, his sponge, and two spare shirts. He took them up and opened them. There lay the novel, in its first shape, in some ten sheets or so. In a single glance, like an eagle

surveying the plain before beginning to soar, he perceived the principal chapters by their vast bulk, so to speak: the Vauquer boarding-house and its boarders, the district; the house of Mme de Restaud and that of Mme de Beauséant, the Faubourg Saint-Germain, the contrast; the character of Vautrin, his tirade against society, his arrest; the Goriot drama, becoming more intense, hurrying to its catastrophe, the death of the old fellow. All that was exact and powerful and irresistibly attractive to him. He began to read. Hardly had he run his eye over a couple of lines when he was seized with the desire to correct, to add, to enrich. *Le Lys* had been wiped away, blotted out: now it was only in the second compartment of his brain. What was urgent — there could be no doubt whatever about it — was this stark, painful work, so profoundly human that he really thought he was making it out of a piece of his heart, with his own flesh. He stretched the first sheet out in front of him. He took in at once all the details and the whole, and his pen sprang upon it. He excised in one place and added in another; he inserted additions to the text between the lines, in the margins, at the top and at the foot of the page, everywhere. With a stroke of the pen he connected the printed text with the manuscript corrections, which he put in wherever he could, wherever he could find room. When there was no room left, he would stick on a sheet of paper, either with a pin or with paste, to the right or to the left, and the proof became like a spider's web, but a human spider's, irregular, weaving in every direction according to the impulse of genius and composing an inextricable network, in which the fly type-setter was destined to die of exhaustion.

In the first hours he got through an enormous amount

of work. The bell for supper rang all along the wall below his room: he did not even pay attention to it. A servant came up to ask him if he was not coming down. He replied: "Of course I'm not! Make me some coffee. Don't worry about anything!"

The de Margonnes, annoyed at his lack of consideration for their guests, considered themselves released from the duty of going up to him, and he never even thought about them. He was enriching his first text as the faithful, when their prayers are heard, enrich a chapel with their ex-votos. They were hanging everywhere. He was in his days of plenty. Five hours passed so. Then, in the middle of the night, he drew back to contemplate the result, and he was suddenly seized with weariness. He had put in too much: it was overloaded! — There were always two men fighting in him: one who wanted to say all that there was to be said, to whose memory there was no end and who ceaselessly brought up new and splendid material; and another, who wanted to tell the story with the utmost possible emotion and whose dream it would have been to quicken narrative, description, and dialogue like the beating of his own heart. Such a Calvary for the artist was assuredly worse torment than that of Sisyphus! And nobody knew it. Not even those to whom he owed his life! Did his mother, who had brought him into the world, such as he was, with this mania for writing and creating, think for one moment that he was like Michelangelo, the giant sufferer in his Sistine Chapel? If the idea had ever occurred to her, she would not have overwhelmed him with letters, half honey and half vinegar, in which, amidst her sighs, she kept upbraiding him for his ingratitude and his selfishness. Selfishness! The memory of the word written in the tiny, neat, and imperious handwriting of

Alfred de Musset and Balzac. Caricature attributed to Théophile Gautier

Victor Hugo, Eugène Sue, Alexandre Dumas and Balzac. A contemporary caricature by Tony Johannot

Mme Balzac provoked him to a painful laugh. He looked at his candles, which were burning low and dying in their sticks. His hand was tired out, his head on fire. He threw himself upon his bed and went to sleep.

It was broad daylight when he awoke; he opened the blinds; the green of the trees was still very pale. He was hungry. He gulped down some cold coffee and sat at his table again, which he pushed up to the window so as to have upon his papers all the young and fresh light of the sky. He took his pen in his hand. The lovely pictures of *Le Lys* passed before his eyes. How beautiful it must be in the dawning of the day, that farm of his dreams! It must catch the first rays of the sun, the awakening of life and love. Supposing he were to run there? He looked at his papers: Père Goriot was beckoning to him. — Paris — that monster! He had to bid good-bye to the Indre and to country life! — Ah, it was in Paris as well, in that hell, that he would place his *César Birotteau*, amidst a whole swarm of riff-raff gnashing their teeth. In the business world it would be a pendant to *Le Lys*, which was the world of feeling. He would create the figure of a man who would personify commercial probity; that character also was about to take shape quietly in his mind. It was becoming refined. But it had to be at the same time both artless and real, virtue without intelligence, the simplicity of the heart without the mind. — He would begin to sculp it only when he felt that he had it well in hand. "Come now, my poor old Goriot, it's between us two!"

Towards eight o'clock the servant came and asked him what he wanted. "Two fingers of white wine," he replied; "two boiled eggs; another pot of coffee and three candles, if Madame will be so kind; for the raw light of day I find tiring! The sun is a good fellow, and

useful, but not worth the good interior light and he kills it if you suffer him to."

They brought him up everything that he asked for. He ate, closed the shutters, and set to work again with the excitement of a sprinter who hears the starting pistol. Ah, on that day what spirits he had, what speed, what raciness in the dialogue! It seemed to him that he could hear all his characters talking at the same time; he hadn't sufficient time to write down what they said; he was losing time.

Towards six o'clock he was exhausted and slept a little. He had just heard again the bell ringing for a meal. He said with a smile: "It must be the signal for going to bed."

And he stretched himself out. Towards midnight he was wakened by the roll of thunder. He went to his window. It was a more than usually dark and oppressive night; but the oppressiveness was penetrated with electric currents, which were as yet invisible, but which Balzac felt, not in the nerves, but, as it seemed to him, in the depths of his soul. He felt no need to take any more coffee. There was the far off rumbling of a storm; nature was motionless, as though afraid of it; and he felt the influence of it, which filled him. He went back to bed, leaving his window wide open; then by the light of a single candle, in which a black butterfly came and scorched its wings, he resolved to write out the death of Père Goriot, which, in his first version, had been merely hinted.

A dull roar could be heard, echoed from valley to valley; there was not a breath of wind; a few drops of rain fell heavily upon the trees, of which not a leaf stirred. As he listened, he said: "That's a storm coming up from the south." And whilst his body, like every-

thing else, was intent and almost numb, he felt that he had acquired a new heart beneath the impulse of a new energy. It was one of those occasions when suddenly, without effort, he doubled himself. He escaped, so to speak, out of himself, and got under the skin of another. To-day it was Père Goriot. He was Balzac no longer, no longer aware of his own heavy frame; he was so completely in communion with the silence which surrounded him that hallucination came to him easily. The roar in the heavens did not interrupt him. Rather it gave the finishing touch to the tragic atmosphere into which he was entering. For now he found himself lying on a truckle-bed in the Pension Vauquer. And he was panting for breath and calling: "My daughters! My daughters! I want to see my daughters! Send the police to fetch them! Compel them to come! Justice is on my side! I have everything on my side, nature and the civil code!" As he wrote, as his pen raced over the paper, he really began to call under his breath and there was a rattle in his throat. "Oh! they will come!" he exclaimed.

He closed his eyes as though he was seeing them. "Come, my darlings! Come and give me a kiss, one last kiss, a viaticum for your father, who will pray God for you, who will tell Him that you have been good girls and plead for you!"

Balzac, lying back upon his pillows, began to breathe like Père Goriot, appallingly to roll his eyes, which suddenly became gentle, and then the fearfully bitter mouth endeavoured faintly to smile, a smile which was an entreaty. By his bed-side he could see Bianchon and Rastignac. He thought they stirred. It was the light from a flash, which was not followed by any noise.

"After all, you are innocent," he moaned. "They are innocent, my friend."

II

The hallucination was so complete that he said these words without thinking of writing them down. And they were followed by lamentations all through which, like the old fellow, his head swayed on the bed. Then Balzac's pen began to race once more, while he continued to moan and to talk, and this time it ran so quickly that he stopped looking at it, so as not to impede his imagination, and all that it wrote was the first letter of words.

"It is all my fault!" he sighed and sobbed. "I have accustomed them to trample me underfoot!" He cried out in despair: "I liked it, I did!"

And suddenly, with the sweat glistening on his face (for that dark night, in which the lowering storm became more and more charged without ever bursting, was suffocating), Balzac exclaimed: "Write to them that I have millions to leave to them!"

With a trembling hand, the hand which held the pen, he was beckoning: "Go on! Write quickly! —" Ink fell upon the sheet. "Word of honour! I'll go and make macaroni at Odessa." (His eyes had opened wide to prove his good faith.) "There will be millions there! I want my daughters! I made my daughters! They are mine!"

The pen scratched the paper. The handwriting, which at first had been very close, had become so hurried that it covered a page in ten lines.

"A drink! A drink!" exclaimed Balzac-Goriot. "My head is a sore! My inside burns! Oh! — Oh! — Put something on my head! My daughters' hand, that would save me!"

At last he felt that he was dying, and to die he let go his pen; it rolled to the floor; he stretched himself out like a man tormented by suffering, stretched out his

hands on either side of the bed, close to which he kept seeing Bianchon and Rastignac and — suddenly he turned into Balzac again! He had just made a wonderful discovery. The significance of art and the artist's joy were coming back to him. He imagined, quite naturally, by that gesture of his hands that Père Goriot was caressing the heads of the students and believed himself to be touching his daughters!

"Ah, my pretty ones!"

He picked up his pen again and wrote those four words of genius in a lightning stroke, while another flash, lurid and dumb, transfigured the room.

He completed his novel during the hours of the night that remained to him. The storm still lowered without ever breaking; and Balzac, in a perspiration which surrounded him in steam, went on in close association with the inarticulate and obscure forces of nature, participating in two worlds at the same time, breathing in one, but seeing in the other, writing in the former, but creating in the latter.

Morning accomplished what the darkness had been unable to achieve. The sun condensed the clouds. A soft, abundant rain began to fall. The sky opened; the air began to circulate; the atmosphere was bright and fresh. And all of a sudden, towards nine o'clock, Balzac pushed the shutters open and from his window, in his shirt-sleeves, called out in a merry voice.

The coachman appeared, then the cook, then M. de Margonne.

"Good-morning!" he exclaimed.

His hair was waving in the wind and he looked like a lion.

"Friends, I've finished! It's magnificent! When you read me, it will make you cry! But I am done up, and

II

I'm terribly hungry. Cut me a pound of bread and spread on it a pound of butter! And prepare me a bath, if you would be so kind! I'm coming down!"

He turned round. The room was in an incredible state of disorder. The bed covers were lying in the middle of the room; the ink-pot was on the saucer of a coffee-cup; the cup itself was on a chair; the room was strewn with papers. He burst out laughing. "One can see that there's been a fight here last night! A veritable battle-field!"

But the last sheet of *Le Père Goriot,* containing the last sentence, followed by this date: *Saché, September 1834* was lying on the bed, and the bed, truth to tell, was a death-bed; whilst the gilt powder with which the nervous hand of Balzac had dried it stayed imbedded in the ink of the letters and, glittering, bore witness to the triumph.

III

THE STRUGGLE WITH DEATH

III

1

The traveller in the mountains on climbing a summit experiences a deep but short-lived joy. He has attained the end of his effort; he has reached his goal; and in bare nature the atmosphere he breathes is so pure that he grows enthusiastic to the point of becoming solemn about it. Such gravity produces a chilling effect. The traveller feels that he is not destined to live at such an altitude, and down he comes again. — Such is life. The years of plenty are short. After struggling long for bare existence a man marked out for success comes to know the day of plenty, but it lasts only a day; back he falls again; and thenceforward the struggle recommences — not to die. Such a man as Balzac has mastered destiny for two or three years at most. Throughout those years he had no money worries, pangs of love, or difficulties in the way of his task which he did not easily surmount. He forgot what he owed by falling in love; the harshness of the woman he loved would be the motive of a moving book. When the book was harshly criticized, he would run to another passion, which drove him into further debts, but produced from him some new romance. He ran everything together, coped with everything, simultaneously lived two or three separate lives, having discovered in coffee a means of not sleeping and of occupying the stillness of night by toil which resembled a storm at sea. Everything that he did, in its buoyant spirit and freedom from care, indicated a magnificent constitution. Genius had triumphed simply because he had the health of a bull.

But quite suddenly the equilibrium of that mighty body broke down. In November 1834 he suffered what

appeared to be a slight shock. He seemed to recover quickly and paid no attention to it, but still it was an intimation that happiness was in jeopardy.

The year 1835 was a year of suffering; 1836 was terrible. He had committed himself to a cycle of such infernal labour that all that he could do was to spend himself in it, without respite. This was what he proceeded to do, with the full awareness of what he was about, but also the fresh joy of adding to his convict's labour the glory of self-sacrifice, for he felt that he was killing himself. Thenceforward he began to look upon himself as a hero, and the pride which such a feeling inspired in him, while it supported him in his work, hurried on the process of exhaustion. How many years had he left? He pushed on. That his work should kill him — well, that couldn't be helped; his glory would be all the greater, but he wanted to finish his work before he died; and so as to finish his work, he died sooner than he otherwise might.

Towards the end of 1835 he felt as though his brain was on fire. He had just completed *Séraphita*. His head was in a ferment. And he was becoming terrifyingly stout. Dr. Nacquart advised him to take exercise. Where? In Paris? "Out of the question," was his reply. "There is too much mud!" The truth was that he was busy writing *Le Lys* after *Séraphita*, and that he refused to budge from his desk. He spent more than two hundred nights on this book. He said: "It is my country of France!" He had still strength enough left to bring it to a successful conclusion, at the risk of collapsing afterwards; but against the remaining trials of life he was without means of defence; he was at the end of his resources; he confessed himself beaten.

His mother, like many women getting on in life, had

a particular faculty of never seeing any good fortune which befell, but of wailing without end the hindrances and the difficulties. She would never come to visit him without saying: "You see! So, you see!" What was there for him to see? In her presence he would keep down his despair; he wanted to justify himself. If in 1835 he was one hundred and fifty thousand francs in debt, that was the fault solely of fate, for he had been the prince of financiers! Oh yes — she might sneer if she wanted to! He proclaimed it from the house-tops. It wasn't his fault if La Touche had paid him only one thousand francs for *Les Chouans*, if Mame had failed, if the Revolution of 1830 had been a calamity for the bookselling trade, if seven hundred francs were all that he received for such a work as *La Peau de chagrin*, which had exhausted him. In 1833, with the Widow Béchet, he had believed that he was in for ten thousand francs a year for three years. As he owed only six thousand francs, that would have left him four thousand: enough to live on! But time had to be found to earn these ten thousand francs with his pen. He had not been able to find it, because it wasn't to be found; God alone would be able to do in one year what was being required of him! Then he had to have recourse to the money-lenders, naturally, who were not content with taking twenty per cent interest from him, but made him lose, by running from one to another and with all the worry they gave him, fifty per cent of his time. A mind tortured by anxieties is incapable of literary creation! Lastly, there was his notorious extravagance, which was always being cast in his teeth. Well, then, if he had bought carriages, it was in order to save his time, always time, that precious commodity. If he needed light at night, it was to prevent him from sleeping. Coffee

and light, that was what he needed, to work and try to pay his debts!

"Pay your debts! — Living the way you do, you had better begin by paying for your coffee and candles!" Mme Balzac would say in a rasping voice.

Indeed, he had in 1835 a bill amounting to one thousand seven hundred and forty-four francs outstanding with Bonnemain, grocer, 8 Place Saint-Michel, at the sign of the Silver Mortar.

"I could pay, I should be able to pay everything off," he would exclaim in exasperation, "if my family didn't cause me all the worry it does!"

"Your family, indeed!" Mme Balzac would say, standing upon her dignity.

"Yes, my family! There's not a single worry that my brother has not sworn ——"

"Your brother! —"

"One day he'll be absolutely down and out, and I shall have to take him in!"

Crimson with anger at hearing her "poor Henry" thus spoken about, Mme Balzac would leave the room, banging the door.

"Oh, if I could only rest!" Balzac would sigh. "Get away from Paris! Buy La Grenadière! — And there, in the silence, in the loveliest country-side in the whole world, let splendid ideas grow, like the vine blossoms on the hill slopes!"

For a moment he would imagine himself breathing the air of his bland and tranquil Touraine with his dear Eva by his side, who would leave Poland to share that happiness. Ah, there he would have no more need of money-lenders! There life could be lived on nothing at all, on the vegetables grown in the garden. There he could snap his fingers at publishers,

reviewers, the public, the drawing-rooms, and the National Guard!

Amongst the horde of enemies bent on doing him harm, the institution of the National Guard was, according to him, one of the most ignoble. Nothing filled him with greater panic — mingled with rage and disgust — than the bare idea that one day he might be compelled perhaps to mount guard! In April 1832 he had consented to buy himself a sword and a pouch. But that was all; he had never answered a single summons. From month to month he had evaded the authorities. He had received warnings and then an intimation of two convictions, each of which had condemned him to two days' imprisonment; twice he had been nearly caught; twice, with the wiliness of a red Indian, he was not to be found. The third time he was arrested. It was one of the dramas of his life.

He was put in jail on the 27th of April 1836, at ten o'clock in the morning, at the Hôtel Bazancourt, which had formerly been a wool store, close by the wine market, and which was nicknamed the Hôtel des Haricots because a plate of beans was the standing dish served to all comers, as in barracks. He was overwhelmed with worries. It was terribly cold. And in his cell, after he had been locked in, in the presence of Werdet, his young publisher, who had hurried to see him, he was seized with such an animal passion of rage that it looked as though he would devour Werdet or run his head against the walls.

In the first place, he couldn't stand the chagrin of having been arrested! It was a dentist, "idiotic and abject, the enemy, naturally, of everything that is great, and far removed from these dirty jobs!" a dentist, a sergeant in the National Guard, who had boasted that

he would arrest him and had in fact arrested him. What a beast! In what respect did Honoré de Balzac serve his country in that filthy cell, six yards square, in which one had to turn round two hundred times (he immediately made the computation in a passion) in order to do a league on foot! And nothing to warm himself with! He was perishing from cold! Besides, it was precisely that: the Government of Louis-Philippe wanted him to die! A plot! There was a plot between the dentist and the king!

Well, he wouldn't die! They had jailed him, as they said in their jargon, which showed such a definite taste for all that was vile, but as far as he was concerned, he would stick it out! And he began vehemently to pace up and down, spitting his contempt for that court and that régime and that bourgeoisie which supported them, all those grocers, who were delighted to go and parade their bellies and strut up and down in the court-yard of the Tuileries under the eyes of that commercial traveller in disguise who was called Marshal Count de Lobau! They believed themselves to be soldiers, word of honour! They imagined themselves to look like Napoleon! And that was the sort of citizen that His Majesty took an interest in. But writers! The Duke d'Orléans and his wife had attempted to give literary evenings. Yes indeed! But the King had not been long in letting it be known that he thought them out of place. Commerce and industry before everything else! Absolute ignorance of the essential, which is the mind! And the proof: Balzac was in the Hôtel de Haricots! Such a spectacle, in the nineteenth century, was enough to make a man weep for rage! It was for that that the people had erected the barricades! And the fools were delighted to have on the buttons of their uniforms of the National Guard: *Order and Liberty.* As though one

were not the absolute opposite of the other! And what is liberty indeed, when it only needs a dentist to shut up a great writer and make him lose ——

Balzac took a pencil out of his pocket, and on the whitewashed walls, between a caricature of Lobau and a quatrain to the following effect:

Ce séjour tranquille
Est pour moi plein d'attraits.
J'y reviendrai docile,
*Car jamais ma garde ne monterai!**

began to do two sums in addition and a multiplication, and declared that, given the work upon which he was engaged, and the quite remarkable form he was in for writing when they came to arrest him, it was a sum of ten thousand francs they were making him lose and that he would claim it and see that they paid!

Then, in a sudden fit of discouragement, he collapsed on a sort of pallet which was against a wall, and said to Werdet: "I am dogged by an evil fate which I can no longer overcome. You see a man done for!"

"Please remember," said Werdet maliciously, "that you already told me that last year. I was imploring you for *Séraphita*, which you didn't want to give me. —"

"I *couldn't* give it to you!" exclaimed Balzac. "Is inspiration to be ordered like a pair of shoes? Contracts between authors and publishers should be unalterable only as far as the publishers are concerned; but the wretched author — if you are quite right in your dates ——"

"I have never been right in my dates!" replied Werdet. "I got *Séraphita* a year late and ——"

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* This quiet spot is full of attraction for me. I will gladly return, for never will I mount guard!

III

"I couldn't give it to you a day earlier!" said Balzac, choking with anger. "There is not a single other writer who has done this year what I have done: *L'Histoire des Treize, Le Contrat de mariage, Séraphita, Le Lys, La Messe de l'athée, L'Interdiction, Le Cabinet des antiques,* and the political articles in the *Chronique de Paris*! Anyone else would have died. And what's my reward? The Hôtel des Haricots and one of the most outrageous plots against my work ever heard of in a civilized country, which pretends to be fond of literature. A plot in which everybody is engaged: the critics, the public, and the Pope! For now it appears that the Pope is taking a hand in it! First of all, my style, that's the great charge against me, my style and my immorality! Not only do I relate sordid stories, but according to the people who do not write at all, since they are critics, it seems that I write badly! Indeed? What else has a writer to do, good heavens, but to say what he has got to say — without forcing himself to say it? Let them go and read Molière again! But they find that he too writes badly! —" (He began to cough.) "How perishing cold it is in this dirty hole! Ah, it's a crime, but I'll expose it! I have always got the *Chronique de Paris*. I knew very well that I needed a review: I foresaw serious developments. They won't get the upper hand in heaven, those gentry at the court, and then they won't find that I write badly, but that I write too much! — We are living in a terrible time of general mix-up: there's overproduction, without principles, without masters, without schools. In all that, the journalists can't make out anything; and of my work all they can see is the abundance of it. Then they say, sniggering: 'The most productive of novelists!' The cretins, the savages, the cannibals that they are! My dear Werdet, a woman of education

who is a charming friend to me — I have already spoken to you about her: Mme Carraud — said to me one day: 'Professional men of letters cannot understand you. You put too much soul into your books!' Now that is just the point. For my part, I go on to say: in France, in Paris especially, the public is worth no more than the critics. I have only recently learned that in Poland — in Poland, mark you — there is a very cultivated circle which exalts me to the skies! Here, on the other hand, jeering takes the place of understanding. Here you come to be appreciated only a hundred years after you're dead. The best of readers know nothing about anything. A woman asked me the other day, at a dinner-party, if I wrote my books as quickly as they could be read! And she went on to say: 'I think you must, so as to avoid dull passages!' Oh, the awful woman! She let the cat out of the bag; she confessed what she was most afraid of: dull passages! Just think of it! Are people capable of reading and perceiving what relation the gradual unfolding bears to the heart of the subject? Dull passages, yes, that's the great complaint! There's another besides: I force my characters! Dear! dear! And what about the sun, isn't the sun forced on certain days? Miserable creatures, born to be blind, and whining the moment they begin to see too much! Why do they buy books? When they might just as well stick to vulgar tittle-tattle about the work as about the man, which would please them every bit as much as my stories, which are history! It seems that I drink, that I gamble, and that I never go to sleep, don't you know, without a lady or two in my bed! And, between ourselves, if I do sleep, they have nothing to fear, and I don't see what objection can be made against me! The Pope should be told about that, my dear Werdet, because it seems that

he is going to condemn my books! I had never thought of making out all the characters on my stage to be saints! — God help me, what courage a man requires to laugh at such stupidity, and I, my poor friend, should like to cry! All that agitation amongst journalists, society ladies, and bad priests, conceals so much ugliness, such little meannesses! What slime! And I now understand Rousseau! I never read him without passion! But I should have to read only him. He proves that human beings are vile. Don't let's go and verify his judgment in newspapers or in drawing-rooms! What a waste of time! When I think that I shall be thirty-seven in a fortnight! It's all over; I am no longer young. Grey hairs and a belly. It's the beginning of physical decrepitude: the other won't be long after it."

"Come, come," said Werdet; "you must have had nothing to eat to be talking such nonsense. Should you like me to go down to the canteen and see what they've got to eat here?"

"A great deal I care," said Balzac. He had taken out his pencil once more. "And I made a mistake in my calculations! I lose, through being here, ever so much more than I told you."

When Werdet returned, Balzac had made a fresh sum in addition.

"I lose fourteen thousand five hundred francs!" he announced.

"Perhaps you will catch up some of it again," said Werdet. "And, in that case, I think you can entertain yourself to a soup at thirty centimes, or a chop with mushrooms at sixty-five, or a pigeon at a franc, or some simple beans at ten sous."

"All that revolts me as much as your Government!" declared Balzac with pride. "You shall go, my dear,

Balzac. After a painting by Louis Boulanger

you shall go to Véfour and order me a dinner fit for a king!"

"What's your idea of a dinner fit for a king? —"

"Such a dinner as would make Louis-Philippe, who, as everybody knows, is not a king, shout for delight!"

The dinner came two hours later. It was of the most ample kind, and Werdet had gone to fetch Balzac's servant to serve it in the dining-hall, before the astonished eyes of the other prisoners.

After his meal he went back to his cell, where Werdet had been successful in having a fire lighted; Balzac had recovered a little self-confidence. They brought him from "a woman admirer who had learned of the abominable outrage" a parcel, in which he found a bunch of lilies of the valley, a *pâté* of partridge, and some apricot jam.

"There are, after all," he said with a sigh, "some charming women. It is true that I have done such a lot for them! — If we had only, my dear Werdet, three thousand devoted women readers certain for each book, there is one thing we could rely upon."

"And that is?" said Werdet. "You interest me."

"Making our fortunes!" said Balzac.

"A mere bagatelle!" said Werdet.

"Don't have the slightest doubt about it, my dear! I am the Walter Scott of France; you are my Archibald Constable; so between us we have all that we need to succeed; and, take it from me, our carriages will meet one day in the Champs Élysées!"

"Oh," said Werdet, "if we had only one between the two of us, that would be already ——"

"Don't get into the habit of looking at everything in a small way!" said Balzac, as, warmed by his digestion, he strode up and down the cell, indulging his new dreams.

But meanwhile a warder came in and told him what

his sentence was. He was confined for six days, until the 4th of May.

"Until the ——!"

He nearly had another stroke, seized the warder by the arm, spun him round, threw him out, and, crimson with anger, shame, and despair, fell back again upon his pallet as he exclaimed: "You can see very well that I'm a man done for!"

On the 4th of May, on receiving his discharge, he said to the faithful Werdet, who was standing by him as ever: "This ordeal has been a lesson. I talk too much; I excite too much attention. They are taking this revenge because I am too good, and give myself too much. Now I understand; I'll change all that. I shall now work in the shade, for myself; nobody shall hear my voice again. Mum's the word! Silence and solitude!"

To secure these it would have been necessary, in the first place, for him not to have had on his hands certain matters of importance which either were or were about to be on everybody's lips. His *Chronique de Paris*, which had been his for six months past, had been limping badly all that time, and he had a strong desire to get quit of it without being able to do so. One of the most important shareholders was Buisson, the tailor, and he had a bill owing to Buisson for clothes, which amounted to four thousand francs. Far from being vexed at this, Buisson used to read the *Chronique* from the first page to the last (there were thirty-two pages, which appeared every third day) and would say to Balzac, as he fitted him with waistcoat or frock-coat: "I cannot understand why, having such astonishing talent, you cannot earn millions; nobody has moved me so deeply with a pen as you have!"

His *Chronique*, which devoured such money as he had

instead of bringing him in any, was not his only anxiety. He found himself once more in as terrible a plight as in 1829! He had forty thousand francs to pay off before the end of the year! And he would tell it to anybody who would lend an ear to listen, to his servant or the most distinguished gentleman in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, at the same time allowing the legend to become established in newspapers and caricatures that he was very rich, because at bottom such a legend flattered his vanity. But it brought him in nothing! And, to add to it all, Mme Béchet, who had married again, a certain Jacquillat, at the instigation of her new husband lodged a claim against him of fifty francs for every day's delay in delivering his manuscript! Ultimately his great hope was *Le Lys*, published by Werdet. *Le Lys*! Good heavens! No sooner had he been discharged from the Hôtel des Haricots than he found himself compelled to engage in ruinous litigation with the director of the *Revue de Paris*, ruinous because he put so much of himself into it and suffered so many disappointments, all because he was so generous and so little of a business man. Buloz, without giving him any notice, had handed over the first half of *Le Lys* to a Saint Petersburg newspaper. At first Balzac thought that he must be dreaming. Then, when faced with the crude facts, extravagant though they might be, he went to law. To make the best of his case he invoked the assistance of his colleagues; he was indeed defending their cause as well as his own: the cause was of general interest to all men of letters. Well! yes indeed! He found them all ready and willing to testify on behalf of Buloz, only too pleased so to make sure of the acceptance of their manuscripts by the *Revue de Paris*. It made Balzac's unsophisticated heart sick! He emerged from the lawsuit successful, but overcome

by his disillusions. The success of the book, of which on the 2nd of June eighteen hundred copies were sold within two hours, did not cure his bitterness. He went to Saché for a few days' rest in the air of Touraine. He collapsed with a stroke in the garden of the de Margonnes. He had to be looked after. Madame became greatly alarmed. She bustled her husband, kept saying: "But I don't want him to die here!" In the end he recovered, and, though he complained of certain disturbances, chiefly of being unable sometimes to stand upright, he was able to return to Paris and work. He had been in rooms for a year now in the rue des Batailles on the hill of Chaillot. In the wall of a drawing-room, with gilded panels and silk tapestries, which he had furnished by merely increasing his indebtedness (the aggregate amount of his debts mattered but little to him now!), the concealed door of a secret staircase opened, as in the châteaux of the time of Louis XI. He would climb this staircase up to a loft, which was where he worked. From there his eyes would range over the Champ-de-Mars, the École Militaire, Grenelle, and the slopes of Meudon, so that a portion of Paris and its neighbourhood was, at any rate, his to the eyes. He would ask himself, sometimes in despair, at other times with defiance: "How many readers of Balzac are there in the houses which I can see and those others which I can guess? There must be some everywhere!" But, with all his money worries, the struggle became too overwhelming, and about the middle of July he accepted an invitation from Count and Countess Visconti, in whose box he was often to be seen at Les Italiens, to go and represent them in a lawsuit at Turin, in which they had serious interests at stake. To leave his desk for a whole month and quietly earn the wherewithal to live by travelling abroad in the

service of a nobleman seemed to Balzac very good business and he went off in such high spirits that he accepted the companionship of a parrot named Mme Marbouty, who dressed up in man's clothes to go with him and exasperated him in every conceivable way, giving him only a few brief moments of pleasure.

He stayed away from the 25th of July to the 22nd of August. A heavy mail was then waiting for him at the rue des Batailles. He returned home exhausted after eighteen hours' travelling in a stage-coach, without rest. He glanced at the envelopes, immediately opened one which seemed to him suspicious, and brought his fist down upon the table with a smashing blow. Still another conviction for not having taken his turn at mounting guard! He saw red. He said: "Right! Either I'll kill Lobau, or, or — I'll quit! I'll no longer stay in Paris!"

There was another letter and he recognized the handwriting upon it: it was from Alexandre de Berny, the son of Mme de Berny. "Ah," thought Balzac, "he will give me news of his mother."

"La Bouleaunière, 27th July 1836.

"This, my dear Honoré, is a letter of mourning. . . ."

Balzac's heart stopped beating. His eyes, with a terrible anxiety, looked over the page for the fatal word, and fell upon it. She was dead! —

Oh heaven! He collapsed in his arm-chair, thunderstruck! Dead! Laure dead! — "Laure!" In a choking voice he called her name, and before measuring the weight of his own sorrow he strove to find her, saw her on her death-bed, saw her dead, laid to rest in her cemetery. "Oh! — My darling!"

A film came over his eyes, but he took up the letter again and made it out as best he could.

"After ten days of the most intense nervous suffer-

ing" (Balzac's hand began to shake) "our mother died this morning, at nine o'clock. . . ." ("Nine o'clock on the 27th of July, where was I? What was I doing? I was in the stage-coach! Why didn't I fall where I was? Only a month ago. — How awful! —") "Her life was a very busy one, was our good mother's; now she is, no doubt, very quiet." ("Poor sweetheart, can she see me, I wonder? Can she hear me? — Why had I no presentiment of her end?" And the picture of the little Marbouty woman came and tortured him like remorse.) "To-morrow at ten o'clock she will be laid to rest beside her Armand, in the cemetery at Grès." ("Ah, I know that cemetery! I can see where she is! I shall leave for there to-morrow! — No, to-morrow I must go to the Viscontis. — I haven't an hour to spare of my own. — I cannot even pay the last rites of respect to the woman who was all in all to me. I am a slave, the most wretched of men!") "Before she fell ill, she sorted her letters and divided them into three bundles; one bundle contains all the correspondence you had with her, ever since she came to know you. This bundle is tied with wool and all sealed; I am imperatively ordered to put it in the fire immediately after her death. In an hour I shall set it alight. . . ." ("Ah! that's all right!" murmured Balzac. "Alexandre is an honest fellow. — But to think that he has never had a line from me, that he has never known anything! What can he think?")

With that power of visualisation which sorrow or joy always gave him, he pictured to himself La Bouleaunière and Laure during that last choking night. The lawn. The pine-trees. The moon — why, the moon was full on the 26th of July; he remembered it well. Towards midnight it must have stolen suddenly into the room where Mme de Berny was lying and she must have said:

"Put out the candles — that I may see the moon. — You can light them again when I shall be dead. —" She didn't know how to lie, for the pains all over her body. And she kept thinking of him, of him only, who was not there. Suddenly they heard the barking of a dog. Panting, she asked: "What can it be? — Is the dog frightened? — Perhaps it is death coming? — Oh, let death come in above all, I can no more!" And very quietly: "If it was Honoré?" Her eyes opened wider. She could see him on the road, on the main road from Nemours to Fontainebleau, coming along at a quick pace. Oh! — She remembered a walk they had taken together one evening arm in arm, under the moon too. — Before the big boundary stone, with "37" cut in big figures upon it, and a fine fleur-de-lis, which Honoré liked to bow to, he had stopped: his body cast a round shadow and she, laughingly, had placed her little feet on the place where his heart was. — Oh, God! It was his heart to-day which was causing her so much suffering, his heart which was rending her! — What a long time it takes, how difficult it is to die! What wrong had she done to God? Had she really committed a sin in giving herself? Why must women suffer the temptation to be kind in happiness, if it is not permitted them? — At length she had attained the day — her last. How handsome Honoré was — how forbearing! — Seven o'clock. — Eight o'clock. — There was a stage-coach from Paris at half-past seven, wasn't there? So the stage-coach must have passed, although they hadn't heard the bells. — Now she could die. — And holding both hands out to her son, she had given her soul back to her Creator in a last choking sob of tenderness, believing herself to be fainting in the arms of Honoré!

Oh, God! And he hadn't seen her for a year! A whole

year! It was horrible! He couldn't forgive himself when he thought of all the misfortunes which had overtaken her: separation from her husband, the death of a daughter, another daughter out of her mind. But on his side, what a year he had just spent! What with the *Chronique de Paris*, the Béchet case, the *Lys* case, all those horrors, he had suffered the tortures of the damned. Yes, indeed, he was a man well done for! With her dead, was there anything that he would ever do again? If critics and public showed themselves without pity, the reason was that they all saw that he was a man overboard. Ever since he had determined to paint all society in its terrible reality, crime and wretched poverty included, the Faubourg Saint-Germain had looked at him askance, and the well-to-do bourgeoisie of the Chaussée d'Antin turned their backs upon him!

"O my darling!" he began to murmur again, evoking the memory of Laure de Berny, "you foresaw all that, when you used to warn me: 'Don't be too trusting or too kindly disposed.'"

To be trusting is to be mad in a world surrounded by pirates — Buloz and the Russians on the one side, the Belgians on the other, both enriching themselves for years past on his brains and his books and his life-blood without ever paying him a half-penny! He was condemned to being for ever cheated. He lived in the world of his own creation, without being able to keep watch upon, or be on his guard against the other. And, in fine, everyone, his friends included, was abandoning him! *Le Lys*, the book into which he had thought that he had put all that was deepest and most sensitive in him, had just been the object of the most outrageous criticisms and calumnies which he had yet had to suffer. He found himself back once more in the rue des Batailles in a

garret, just like fifteen years ago. What a waste of years with nothing to show for them! At one time they had scorched him, at another frozen him; and if it hadn't been for the loves of certain women ——

This last thought was the only one capable of affording him some relief. It was the one plank in the shipwreck. At any rate, there still remained to him a few human souls in whom he could place his trust. He felt himself to be so weak in the terrible loss which he had just sustained, and such imperious necessity of telling what an angel had just been taken from him! By exalting her merit he would be able, he thought, somewhat to abate the remorse which he felt at not having seen her again. And as though he was discharging a dutiful task, he set himself to write forthwith to three women.

The first one was called Louise; that was all that he knew about her. He had never seen her; but for months they had been exchanging letters, which at first had been cries of admiration and then calls to love. By remaining mysterious she exercised upon him a poetic attraction, which was irresistible. She was the first woman to whom he told his sorrow.

"The woman whom I have lost was more than a mother, more than a mistress. — Only divinity can explain her quality. She sustained me by word and deed and her devotion through great storms. If I am alive, I owe it to her; she was all in all to me."

Amongst his letters was one from Mme Carraud. He opened it. She was urging him, as ever: "Do leave your furnace! Come and *mend* yourself here!" Ah, if only he could! His mind leaped in a bound to Angoulême, to the beautiful life that simple woman lived. The advice which she had given him had always proved right. And again, how good and gracious she had been, all through

these later years, after she had come to know that Mme de Berny was ill! She had come to recognize the nobility of her character; she had even said: "I want to make her acquaintance." She had asked her, along with Balzac, to Angoulême and to her country-house at Frapesle, near Issoudun. He owed it to himself to tell her immediately about his great misfortune. He saw himself by her side in the little garden of the powder factory. As he wrote to her, he spoke to her.

Lastly, could he have done without sending a long letter to his dear Eva? But to her, who was his mistress, he could not show the same utter sincerity as he had done to the others, who were merely friends. Mme Hanska had become very wayward. He still continued writing to her the most beautiful letters in the world, because the absence of the loved one made him lyrical; but this very lyricism of his spoiled her; she was for ever requiring more, and couldn't but feel terribly jealous of all the women who appeared here and there in Balzac's complicated life. She had sent him such bitter letters that in 1835, with money borrowed from Werdet, Balzac had posted to Vienna, where she was then living, in order to soothe her. The scenes which he had with her were violent, but their very violence was profitable; they became reconciled again. She could never withstand his eloquence. With his voice, his eyes, his vehemence, which was unaffected even when he was lying, for he kept deceiving himself, and in the fire of his own kindling would see — all that there is to be seen in the fire, the most foolish and the most beautiful dreams! — he could cajole and convince her. She became, as it were, as intoxicated when she listened to him as she did in reading him. But when she was alone, her thoughts concerning him were unkind. When he was in front of her,

she found him bursting with genius and admired him too much not to love him. As soon as he was at a distance, she saw him unfaithful, incapable of keeping a reckoning, ruining himself, deceiving her, and she began to think: "Genius isn't everything!" Then she began to give ear to every rumour, truthful or slanderous.

On the day the terrible news reached him of Mme de Berny's death, Balzac could not refrain, in the first burst of sorrow, from comparing Eva with the woman who had gone, and who had been so full of tenderness and generosity and trust, who perhaps had died of a broken heart and had never said so. Oh! the dear woman! With what magnanimity she had renounced love when she had seen old age come upon her! How well she knew how to love, thinking only of the man she loved! For had she not said to him when he came back from Geneva: "I feel that now you know the woman who suits you best, and I think it is a very good thing"?

Adorable heart! He might go over again the memories he had of her and consider them one by one; there was not one but it made his heart ache: at Villeparisis, the delirium of the first emotions and the first embraces — at Paris, with dramatic surprises, and how kind she had always been! — at La Bouleaunière, peace, work, rapture — at La Grenadière, where the lovers had gone to be alone together for two weeks, so that Honoré should retain the wonderful memory of having loved her in the country which he loved best. And the letter she had written to him about *Le Lys*, that *Lys* which he had written to lull the suspicions of Mme Hanska and to glorify Mme de Berny, to whom this crown had been long promised — what a wonderful appreciation it had been and how insignificant in comparison with her were all the critics in the world!

III

Then he wrote to the Countess the following letter, at once full of feeling and dignified:

"Mme de Berny has died. I will not tell you any more. My sorrow is not the sorrow of a day; it will react upon my whole life.

"She was sincere. She wanted only my good and my perfection. I make you her heiress, you who possess all her noble qualities. . . .

"And I do not think that I am committing sacrilege in sealing this letter to you with the seal which I used in writing to Mme de Berny: I have taken an oath to wear this ring on my finger."

When he had finished this note, he read it once more and it pleased him. But he was suffering from pains in the head. He needed fresh air. He could not sit still. His nerves rebelled in reaction against his despondency. So he went out and walked as far as the Étoile, where the foundation stone of the Arc de Triomphe had been laid on the day after he had left for Italy. There was only one paling remaining, behind which a piece of sculpture was being completed. Stupendous monument! It was erected to the glory of the armies. —

Glory! Balzac, in his sorrow and distress, wondered if glory was not like love and perished quickly, wondered if it deserved all the concern that men showed for it. —

2

Despondency in such a character as Balzac's could be permanent only so long as his state of health kept growing worse. Now it began to improve, the result, according to him, of a fruit cure! He had inherited from his father the faculty of becoming suddenly infatuated with certain diets. After laying down the main lines of them

in soliloquies which gave his mind raptures of delight, he would put them into practice in a burst of enthusiasm; and as his morale was all-powerful over his physical disposition, he soon felt a great improvement, which became the subject of another resounding soliloquy, delivered before the mirror, or in the presence of his doctor.

He liked Dr. Nacquart. He used to say to him: "Doctor, you have a fine French name, a handsome Lorraine head, and your manner of life charms me; what a magnificent life! Your monograph upon Gall has shown that you are one of the great minds of your time. In your opinion, the philosophic part of his work is still worth preserving, is it not?"

"— It is a nice point," Nacquart would say. "You must distinguish ——"

"Of course, I see what you mean!" Balzac would break in. "You realize that I too have made a thorough study of all that. I had to, for the sake of my work, which, as you know, has just made great strides. Doctor, I believe that, a year from now, the three great portions of the monument will be, if not finally completed, at all events securely laid one on top of the other, and that it will be possible to form an opinion of the whole! You know Bourges Cathedral? My work will be the Bourges Cathedral of literature!"

And forgetting Gall and Nacquart, he went on, as he paced up and down: "First layer: *Studies of Social Customs*, comprising all forms of social activity, every single one! No situation in life, no character, no occupation, no social station, no French landscape, shall be omitted! There's the foundation! Second layer: *Studies in Philosophy*. After the effects, the causes. I shall explain why people feel as they do. Having scoured society

in order to describe it, I shall scour it again in order to appraise it. Lastly, *Studies in Analysis*. Once cause and effect have been determined, the question of principle remains. Social customs make the play; the causes are the wings and the stage machinery; the principle is the author!"

He was never so happy as when thus vigorously making out his program. And he was tortured by the desire of improving it endlessly, and endlessly classifying, and classifying again, his books. His work must be big and clear; he hoped to win applause even from narrow-minded readers. He thought to himself: "The sun gets the votes of all men living. Why shouldn't a great artist produce the same effect?" After eating cherries, plums, pears, and peaches by the hundredweight and the ton, he felt that his mind had grown clearer and he was ready once more for a titanic struggle! So he started again upon plans which he had made when he was a young man of twenty years. He wanted both fame and money. The simple Mme Carraud thought that one might be famous without necessarily being rich. She was mistaken! One must first be rich!

"By not being rich," he kept on saying, "I lose thirty thousand francs a year. If I was rich, I could prevail. If I was rich, I should be the one asked and not the solicitor. Eugène Sue is a nonentity, but he is rich, and so people form queues to be received by him. I shall have an undiscussed position in literature only when I acquire a commanding situation. People don't discuss Mont Blanc!"

Mont Blanc was uninhabitable. Otherwise, swept away by his romanticism, he would have gone and taken up his quarters there! Instead he merely went to Sèvres, unable to see himself any longer at Chaillot, where the

National Guard, of hideous aspect, had located him; but he covered up this mediocre reason in brilliant arguments in favour of the place selected by his imagination. It was Saint-Simon apparently, who, in his *Mémoires*, indicated the district between Versailles and Paris as the most suitable dwelling-place for a great man. It was only right to put into practice such an observation of the *grand siècle*. From that vantage ground Honoré de Balzac would dominate all Paris. There he would impress the minds of people, and people would no more come knocking on his door. That was turning the tables on Marshal Lobau! There he would enjoy a life of solitude in the country, like Mme Hanska at Wierzchownia. He would be awakened by the birds. The consequence would be that his genius would take an enormous leap forward. There, at last, he would be able to build an ideal house, as he conceived it, suited to his tastes. And at one time he was to be seen going into rhapsodies over a print of the Pitti Palace at Florence; at another time he would be proclaiming that modern architecture was the mother of all inventions, and that on a surface of one hundred feet square they could build you the house of your dreams, by the ingenious laying of four stones.

The purchase of his site, the planning of the house, getting on with the work of building, were all for him not merely an incident of his existence, but a matter of the very greatest importance. In his mind, it all had a symbolic as well as a commercial value. To live in the place of his choice was to set a crown upon his work, but in the place of his choice he intended to grow rich; that is to say, at last to adapt himself to the times he lived in, when money was king. Was money the only word on the lips of the common people, the bourgeois,

and the courtier, morning, noon, and night? Well, then, he would do like the others; he would earn money too! To begin with, in ten years' time the value of property would have become threefold; so there was no need to stint anything; everything should be very simple, but first-class. In the next place, there would have to be planted there, and cultivated, what up till that time had not been cultivated in France anywhere, through ignorance and lack of initiative! If it had not been for Francis I, who would have been bold enough to introduce orange-trees into Amboise? Well, he, Balzac, would experiment with pine-apples at Sèvres. Oh, his friends might laugh! They were the same who, ten years before, had jeered at railways! It was showing a lack of confidence in the intelligence, whereas it was intelligence which led the world.

And it is imagination which, thank heaven, makes the world beautiful. Balzac never saw what his house Jardies was like in reality: a tiny villa, wretched and squalid. When the trees were only a few inches high, he already went off into raptures: "How beautiful they are! They keep me from seeing my dog!"

Jardies was a product of his will. He cared nothing for the jeers of a Gozlan, who was a scoffer, like all Frenchmen devoid of genius. Jardies was his house and therefore a great house. Now the thing to do was to live memorable hours in it, and he invited Hugo, who was Poetry as he himself was the Novel. Hugo, like a quiet, well-behaved citizen, got into a bus at the Concorde, got down at the stop before the right one, lost his way, and arrived late. Before the house he rather shook his head. "Well! — it's rather peculiar!" In the paths, which Balzac had caused to be tarred like the boulevards, Hugo said: "Dear me — that's a sensible idea!"

He spoke a few Olympian words to the birds — who were singing, but across the wall, and at last, after going inside to take a cup of coffee — the same coffee in regard to which he used to inquire beforehand: "Will it make me a novelist?" — he embarked upon an eager conversation on momentous political questions with Balzac.

He declared himself for the common people. Balzac told him that the heart of the common people was sound, but that they had no eyes; they had feelings, but they couldn't see. Whereas a government should see and never listen to sentiment.

Hugo was for liberty. "Madness!" said Balzac. "Liberties, yes! But Liberty, never!"

Hugo cried up the Charter. Balzac retorted with violence that Louis XIV had only courtiers and servants; whereas a king with a charter under his arm was flattered, served, and fawned upon by free men: how abominable that was!

Hugo finally brought up the sufferings of the proletariat. Balzac said: "Don't inspire them with envy. Take care what you are about! You are killing the beliefs of the poor! The only fanaticism left to them is hunger and despair. One day they will rise and plant their feet upon the heart of the country!"

After Hugo had gone, Balzac thought: "There's a conversation which ought to have been overheard by all Europe. It took place at Jardies! Jardies is henceforth a name in history!"

A year later there was not a word in the French language signifying worse abominations. Every kind of mortification, excluding none, was his, and all on account of that house! And such misfortunes, moreover, as happened only to him! The garden walls, which had been quite recently put up, collapsed! Eight thousand

francs in ruins! And the National Guard, of the country this time, locked him up in the filthy prison at Sèvres for seventy-two hours because he had refused to take his turn at looking after the harvesting of the grapes! That was too much! He would sell the property! To whom? To everybody and anybody! There would be no lack of buyers! . . . What? They wouldn't take his figure? Was it possible? He would be unable even to get back the price which he had paid for it? Ah, he had done well one evening, in the company of friends, to spit upon Paris from the top of his garret. Well, if he had been deluded once more, at any rate he wouldn't moan about it; and the gentry who kept caricaturing him would find that they had wasted their time. He would foot the bill as he had always done, by his work, his labours of Hercules!

But the caricaturists did not have Jardies only for exercising their talents upon Balzac. In 1839, having become more than ever convinced that it was necessary for him to have such a national position, outside letters, as would make him a public character, he thought that he had found the opportunity in a criminal case of showing his devotion, of sacrificing himself, of being at once Voltaire and Beaumarchais, the Voltaire of the Calas case, and the Beaumarchais of the *Mémoires*. A notary of Belley, one Peytel, had been put in prison on a charge of having murdered his wife. After the murder a preliminary inquiry had been held by the authorities, but without positive result; the matter seemed to be buried, when Peytel, in the course of an evening spent amongst friends, permitted himself to talk in a fashion which stupified, as it scandalized, his audience. The authorities resumed their inquiries, and the notary was arrested. Then Balzac, far away from the seat of the

crime, rose in indignation! And why Balzac? Because he had made the acquaintance of Peytel, when they were both on the newspaper *Le Voleur*, and professed that he was incapable of committing such a crime. He went thoroughly into the matter, or, at all events, believed he did; then he declared that the notary was blameless, spoke and wrote, endeavoured to influence newspaper editors, and at last left for Belley. He did not trouble to inquire what might be the most suitable way of opposing the authorities. He had no sooner arrived than he rang the bell at the house of the examining magistrate. It was nine o'clock in the evening. A maidservant opened the door and informed him that His Honour had already retired to his room. "Well, then, where is his room?" Balzac inquired. "There's a man's life at stake. He cannot possibly refuse to see me!" And he made his way into a bedroom, where the magistrate, in a dressing-gown, was engaged in winding his watch. "Your Honour," Balzac began, "forgive me for breaking in upon you like a burglar; but not everyone is a burglar who looks like one! Peytel is no more guilty than I am! —" And thereupon he began the most urgent entreaty, without stopping to take breath, accusing the accusers with such vehemence that the hangings of the closet suddenly opened, and a woman appeared in a nightdress, lying on the bed, who exclaimed: "Sir you are lying!"

Choking with rage, Balzac exclaimed: "What is this woman doing here?"

Then the Judge became red in the face and said tartly: "Sir, what an honest woman should be doing at this hour of the night! She is in her husband's bed!"

Luckless Balzac, devoid of prudence, devoid of tact! All the lessons given him by Mme de Berny and Mme Hanska had been unable to control his torrential charac-

ter. Torrents, especially in France, are frightening. People prefer placid streams. The authorities mistrusted him; public opinion was antagonistic. His novels had won him the élite amongst women; the Peytel affair, in which he accused a woman of adultery, ranged half of his woman readers against him. Popular songs were composed about him; epigrams were circulated concerning him; and the authorities guillotined Peytel. Balzac went back to Belley; he was in the first row of the crowd, just behind the soldiers, to see Peytel die; and he returned to Paris sick at heart, exasperated, physically ill. The country, which refused to listen to the pleadings of genius, seemed to him to be on the road to ruin. He had been considered the victim of his imagination: the thought made him mad! Had not God given him imagination to enable him to see what the blind were incapable of seeing? How discouraging! And yet — and yet he did not want to give it up! More than ever he dreamed of dominating the multitude, of compelling their admiration by some deed or some work.

One day Hugo imparted to him, with a wealth of detail, the pecuniary advantages of dramatic authorship. During the twenty years past, in which he had been dreaming of success upon the stage, he had asked nothing more than to be persuaded. And Hugo was eloquent, for the topic had a mighty interest for him. Hugo was concerned about his royalties. One half of his soul was a poet's, the other a notary's. So it gave him pleasure to expatiate upon the sums of money which a play could bring in, first in Paris and afterwards in the provinces. He pointed out that a play, even if it was only a half success, gained for its author as much as two successful novels, and that a play which was a triumphant success meant at the same time a fortune. And revivals! And

royalties! And the cash! Balzac saw heaps of gold. Hugo had no sooner gone than he made up his mind once more to write plays. Not, of course, to start again on a tragedy, which would require two years' work, but he had quite sufficient energy and fire to toss off in a couple of months, perhaps a couple of weeks, an excellent comedy, which would bring him in money, and money meant rest for two years. Meanwhile he met the formidable Heinrich Heine on the boulevards. He was full of his schemes; he confided them boisterously to Heine. "I can earn two hundred thousand francs with a year's work!"

"Hum, but it's rather risky!" Heinrich Heine said.

"Risky? How? There's no risk for me!"

"It's a change of penal servitude. Be careful of what you are about. All the convicts die of it! Stay in your novelists' settlement."

"How these Semites have the gift of depressing you, with their terrible irony!" thought Balzac when they parted. "Always that frightful grin! There's no life in the man. He doesn't like life. He is quite the reverse of a dramatic author."

Whereas he conceived himself to be born for the stage! If he hadn't written any plays as yet, it was because the work to be done in the novel brooked no delay. Before he came, the novel had been almost non-existent, whereas the stage had known great moments. But the stage had fallen so low! Managers had one cry only: "There is not a single play. Not one!" So that an enthusiastic welcome was waiting for a comedy or a drama signed with the name of Balzac. The worthy Hugo, who spoke wonders about the craft of the playwright, was worn to a shred. Just like Dumas! And Casimir Delavigne was at the end of his tether — Scribe as well. He wasn't the only one to say so: that was what the manager of La Renaissance

kept writing to him. And so the time had come to try on the stage the revolution he had achieved in the writing of the novel, to paint in true colours!

So he went off to find managers and they charmed him — with honeyed words. He told them: "I will gladly give myself up to you. I will gladly make a fortune along with you. But I must work in peace. I must keep my creditors at bay, then, as long as I am working. I must have — an advance of some fifteen or twenty thousand francs." They embraced with enthusiasm the principle of his proposal: "Set to work, at any rate, and presently we'll sign you a contract which will fulfil all your wishes!"

He had two or three subjects for a play and he would have liked to handle them all together. "Paris is changing," he thought. "Gas-lighting is making it the city of light. Paris is becoming the capital of capitals; and the public in Paris is the first in the world. Now is the time to get hold of it. I must strike a heavy blow!"

The success of a colleague, the name of an author, everything gave him an excuse for turning his imagination to the stage. He wished to create a part for Samson, for Mme Dorval, for Frédérick Lemaître. He could see the part and the immediate effect, and the results in the box-office, which would enable him to say to Mme Hanska: "Dear Eva, I am no longer poor! I am no longer a farthing in debt. If your husband is some day called to heaven, there is no longer any obstacle in the way of our marriage, which shall be a magnificent union between the intelligence of Europe and its nobility!"

He set to work again with fury. He conceived a scheme. He wrote a dialogue. Unhappily, every time the spirit of the stage took hold of him, haunted as he was by the idea that the dramatic art did not suffer

dull passages, and that everything should be said in the least possible time, with the utmost possible animation, he always worked as though he was in a whirlwind. He was seized with the giddiness of speed. He had no sooner written down something for one character to say than he had already devised the reply! He relied upon his astonishing facility for inventing conversations; he became drunk with words; on and on he went; high spirits took the place of observation; once a situation pleased him, he was incapable of seeing beyond it, took it for granted, gave it its place; and all the time he believed himself to be Molière, whilst really he was playing at writing light comedies. Even in his study Balzac was the victim of stage illusions. He kept seeing the footlights, the colour of the scenery, the rising of the curtain, the theatre crowded with a rapt audience; under his feet he felt the boards; and he was seized by a need of talking, of acting, and of being applauded quickly, for anything at all. Instead of the two months' work which he had at first contemplated, he would spend two weeks, sometimes only two days, in throwing three acts upon paper. Whereas he used to laugh at a woman who asked him if a novel took more time to write than to read, he would write his plays in the time it took to speak them. Finally, he was in such a hurry to have them performed, once they were finished, that he performed them himself without being able to wait for the test of the theatre. He would run to the houses of friends, or else invite them to his. He no longer stood in awe either of literary people, whom he detested, or society people, whom he despised. He needed an audience; he would tackle any, no matter which; that was part of the risks which attended his trade; at a box-office would anybody be refused? So one evening found him at the Marquis de

Custine's, performing a comedy before the most contemptuous of audiences. The next day he would be spending three hours at the house of the chatterbox Mme Marbouty, playing before her alone, a play with fifteen characters. This childish necessity of trumpeting what he had written he would disguise under excuses which he knew to be valueless: he wanted to perceive what the effect was like, to see how people would take the wearisome passages. — Yes indeed! And all that he could ever see was what was successful! He became so excited that he was snared in his own devices, and his readings always ended in such high nervous tension that he could no longer suffer criticism. He would cut short the most candid of his friends by saying: "I know, I know, it's a trifle! You should see the whole. The whole is tremendous!"

One day in 1839 he invited to Jardies Théophile Gautier, Gozlan, Lassailly, Laurent-Jan, first to lunch, and after to hear a comedy read which he had just finished, entitled *Les Mercadets*. When the third course was served, Gautier, who was intimate with Balzac, and full of affection and admiration for him, allowed himself to remark: "Am I dreaming? It seems to me that everything tastes of onion. I feel as though I were becoming an onion!"

"Child," retorted Balzac, "that was my idea — for my reading! For I want you all to have clear judgment. Now, I have made numerous experiments with onions; there's no food more beneficial to the mind. Onions make the mind subtle by dispelling all heaviness."

After having so prepared them, why should he let his guests rest after leaving the table? He made them merely change rooms; they went into what he called "the room of the future," where on the whitewashed

walls were such inscriptions as "A Raphael here," "A Titian there," "A Rembrandt there." He himself placed his company, so as to see the expression of their faces, forbade smoking, and, standing up in his dressing-gown, began to read — or rather to act the comedy. For he gave no stage-directions and did not explain who the characters were. As each came on, he altered his voice, his expression, the movement of his body. It was Proteus playing a comedy! And with what speed, what tricks, what lyricism!

Acted by a couple of servants, the performance might have seemed childish; but in his mouth the common stuff took on an aspect of novelty. It was a brilliant start, a dialogue in a Molièresque key, recited by two voices out of one and the same throat, which made one think of the Comédie Italienne. The audience was won over immediately and burst out laughing at the first comic remark, when Mercadet, ordering lunch, is informed by his servant of the refusal of the purveyors. Being no longer paid, these decline to let their wares go. Then Balzac, who appeared to have been living in the skin of the character Mercadet for forty years, flung out, in a nasal tone, at once insolent and overbearing; "What? What are these purveyors who do not purvey?" It wasn't merely a jest: it was an admirable spontaneous exclamation, and Gautier, who knew the author well, was jubilant. And again: "Is there anything dishonourable in being in debt? Where is the man who doesn't die insolvent as regards his father?"

But Gautier was not long in perceiving a vein of cynicism which spoiled the tone of the play. It slipped out of life on to the stage; it was so overloaded with wit as to be artificial; it had ceased to be Balzac in life, and had become Balzac at dinner. Then it ceased to be

Balzac at all. Mercadet turned into Scapin and because of that acquired some value. The manner in which he set about tricking his creditors was most diverting. There Balzac was really great — great as Mercadet and great as his creditors. For the former he had succeeded in catching a tone of blarney which completely confused the latter; the creditors seemed to be greatly bothered; they held their pockets and their hats; and one began to bleat, a second gnashed his teeth, and a third began to mew. They had come in threatening; and now there was a panic amongst the creditors, an admirable helter-skelter, in which Balzac pretended at once to flee and to pursue. Suddenly, with a brilliant piece of wit, the first act ended. The astonishing voice, the multiple voice, the voice which was a whole company, a complete stage, stopped. And instead of the curtain coming down, a burst of laughter from the author. He was glistening as though he had just come out of the water, panting like a Triton.

"How does it go?" he exclaimed. "Are you pleased? It isn't dialogue any longer, but the roar of the wind, what? A fine draught through the theatrical world, my friends!"

Opening his dressing-gown wide, he hitched up his trousers, cursing his braces for not holding them. He had attained that point of success, when there was distinctly heard outside the ring of a bell. Then he quaked, turned pale, jumped up on one of the windows, and in a tone of urgent entreaty, called out: "Help me, friends! Quick, help me! Close the shutters! It's the creditors!"

Then, leaving everybody sitting in the darkness, he ran to the kitchen, gave orders that nobody was to be let in on any pretext whatsoever, came back to his guests, spread himself out on a sofa, and pretending to be dead, murmured in a voice which seemed to come

out of the grave: "I implore you — do not stir! If they hear a sound, it's all up with me!"

The general impression at first was that it was the second act of the play. There was a certain hesitation. But the tone had altered; and his friends saw that he was in such a state that, in their bewilderment, they obeyed the strange injunctions. Then, as the situation continued, it became farcical; it was *Les Mercadets* over again; there was some smothered giggling. Balzac groaned: "My friends — my friends, you'll be the death of me!"

And at that moment they heard what seemed to be a lively altercation on the door-step. There was a number of visitors. The servant said with insistence: "You can see very well, gentlemen, that the shutters are up. My master is away travelling! Then one was heard to gnash his teeth, another bleated, and a third mewed, just as in the play. Balzac lay rigid, not daring to breathe; one would have said that he had no sensation left but for the glitter and the note of entreaty in his eyes in the darkness. This farcical drama lasted for a quarter of an hour. At last the door of the house was closed, and Balzac groaned, in a voice which came from the depths of his soul: "I have put on ten years! —" He ran to the kitchen; his friends were still sitting in the gloom; to revenge themselves they began to smoke. Balzac reappeared and called them murderers. So everybody wanted him to die; inside, they were trying to choke him; outside an onslaught was being made on his money! For they were creditors indeed, and of the most formidable kind: a wine merchant from Vouvray, an antique-dealer, and a building contractor!

"Come, now," said Gautier, "yes or no, are we now entitled to light and air?"

III

"But I should just like to know who's keeping you from opening the shutters!" replied Balzac magnificently.

He had recovered his natural colour, his energy, and his voice. Without further delay he began the second act. Now he was Mercadet's son-in-law. He came on, with his chin deep down in his high collar and his hat in his hand, muttering: "Sir, I make bold to say you do not know your daughter."

"Allow me ——"

"You do not know her, sir!"

It was a firework of wit, an enchanting spectacle of gesture; the audience hadn't the slightest idea how the characters came on or went off; but there they were, for Balzac was there. He played them; he led them. He was they; and he was at the same time the god or devil who inspired them.

Without a moment's rest he leaped from the second act into the third, merely remarking: "All right? Going well? The onion working? Come on!"

Then he was Napoleonic! The creditors appeared again, the creditors of *Les Mercadets;* at the bleating, the gnashing of teeth, and the mewing, the spectators imagined that they were listening to Balzac's creditors again. He spoke from all quarters, for the prodigious man, as he acted, kept twisting and leaping and turning about. The creditors seemed to be pouring in through the door, the window, and the chimney. Was it reality or merely stage play? Were they supposed to laugh? Should they be terrified? But Balzac led the revel: all they could do was to follow him. What energy! What activity! And how sublime he was when, towering above them all, the real creditors, those in the play, and his friends in addition, he folded his arms and said proudly,

in a voice like thunder: "There, now, do you think I own the printing-press of the Bank of France?"

There was a hurricane of applause. All his guests looked at each other, broke out into exclamations, choked with emotion. Such a unanimity of rejoicing gave him once more a formidable burst of energy to carry off the end of the play, in which the spectators saw, as in the most banal of light comedies, the *deus ex machina* arrive from India, the partner of the story, with bags of money to save everything and it was the apotheosis of Mercadet-Balzac in a supreme gesture and a supreme exclamation. Money? Was there money? Real, genuine money? On the spot he made a loan of ten thousand francs and burst into a roar of laughter. "Ha ha! Ha ha! Now *I* am a creditor!"

These were the last words of the play. Gautier threw himself into the arms of Balzac. "You are tremendous! You deserve to be thee-and-thou'd!"

Generous illusion of the stage! Balzac had lost his head by making the audience lose theirs. But all that it amounted to was a success at Jardies! He had not been born under the star of dramatic authorship. On the stage all that he was destined to know was failure. After working with frenzied speed and never a correction he would go to rehearsal like a hurricane and emerge fatigued, exhausted, empty. He would quarrel with managers, actors, and scene-shifters. After swearing that he would not change a syllable of his words, he would between one rehearsal and another, in one night, rewrite an act. He was to be met on the boulevards, pale and hollow-cheeked, without a tie, and unrecognizable for weariness. The most extravagant rumours circulated about him. There wasn't an actor but had some surprising anecdote to tell about him, and he would act

them all, after having made them act for him on the stage.

Of all his failures *Vautrin* was the most resounding. The eldest son of Louis-Philippe was in the audience in a stage box. Frédérick Lemaître, having got himself up as a Mexican general bearing a marked resemblance to the King, the heir to the throne abruptly left the theatre. There was a general commotion, great scandal; the day after, the play was banned.

The blow was such a heavy one that Balzac took to his bed, but, on his feet again in the course of the following week, with brain clear and glowing heart, he explained to his friend Gozlan how he had made up for the twenty thousand francs of income which his play ought to have earned him. He proposed to plant a vineyard at Jardies and install a dairy!

Vautrin failed on the 14th of March 1840. The dairy project brightened the 21st, which was the first day of spring. It was given up on the 22nd. And on the 23rd, Balzac turned his thoughts to journalism. He loathed and adored the press. He adored writing for it, fighting in it, and being all-powerful; but he wanted to be free and he was wroth that they stopped him every time and clipped his wings. Money once more! Money was the real dictator of all the sheets, and a power which it would never do to offend. So for ever feeling the pinch, and inwardly raging, Balzac dreamed once more of having a newspaper of his own. Hadn't he more vigour and irony, more sulphur, so to speak, in his brain than all those scribblers who were the idols of the public? And like Diderot, how he thirsted after the monologue! The *Chronique de Paris* had failed, involving him in heavy loss. Was that any reason for being afraid, for acting the coward, for not making another attempt of a

different kind, by different means? This time he would found a monthly review, which should be like a book, easily slipped into a pocket. There he would do all manner of things: satirize politicians, review books and the comedy of life. He would expose the nullity of such a man as Thiers, that ravenous little bourgeois, and set out the prophetic views of such a poet as Hugo, who alone was capable of avenging the insults heaped upon men of letters. He would expose the incapacity of Eugène Sue. To begin with, was there ever such a name? To pose as an aristocrat with a name like that! And Eugène in addition, the name of a coachman! Eugène Sue was what was left over from a grandfather's skin disease. Why, reading Sue was liking eating suet! And smelt so? Pah! as Hamlet said. Lastly, he would praise up and launch that writer of the first excellence, Stendhal, the author of *La Chartreuse de Parme*, a great book, in which one is at a loss what to admire most, the landscape, the character sketches, the knowledge of Italy, the psychology, or the diplomatic mind!

He achieved his aims; he founded the *Revue parisienne*. It appeared for three months and involved him in debts which took five years' work to pay off. The few subscribers to the first number had withdrawn as soon as the second appeared. In two numbers he had antagonized the whole of Paris: other reviews, which shut their doors in his face; the literary circle, which felt itself threatened as soon as a mediocrity was attacked; the political world of clever rogues. He gave them all the impression of a man possessed, as tiresome in his enthusiasms as in his onslaughts; he well deserved to be ruined! He was too powerful, too personal, too inspired. The currents which emanated from him were too strong to flow evenly along with the slighter currents from more

cautious souls. It is of such that society is composed. Balzac's martyrdom is only too well known. It is renewed several times in a century, and regularly becomes an honourable inheritance after being a dishonourable burden.

Meanwhile it was necessary for him to go on living and eating and clothing himself and paying a few debts, in the first place to free his conscience, and after to be able to contract fresh ones. Finding no kind of success anywhere, he returned without more ado to the work for which he was by nature intended. If he so frequently strayed from his great design, it was because he was too fond of life, even the futilities of it, and he was always sincere in the belief that he endowed its futilities with a kind of grandeur. He had been ambitious even of being received into the Academy. Did it not stand for a noble tradition? Would not each of them be doing honour to the other by joining hands? In being the first to stretch out his, with a generous recklessness, he had no notion of all the obscure intrigues which prevented such an association of old men, devoid of enthusiasm, from answering his gesture. When he discovered them, he was more angry than disgusted. Everywhere the human race was alike, preoccupied with little meannesses. He must turn his back on man and go on with his work in solitude. His work, that was his true mistress. Was there ever a single thought he had which didn't relate to his work? The object of all his efforts, in one direction and another, was simply to erect a pedestal to the writer he craved to be: but the main thing was to be that writer. In conversation with a friend, the Marquis de Belloy, who had just returned from Italy, he had discovered a general title, as important as the roof for a house or the bell-tower for a church. It seemed to him

Balzac. A caricature by Benjamin

admirable. In speaking of the *Divina Commedia* of Dante, the Marquis had casually said: "As for you, what you write is the human comedy!"

And so these two words, for Balzac, became detached from the conversation, as though his brain shed a light upon them, leaving the rest in darkness. *The Human Comedy*! The comedy in which we all play a part. That was it! It was a title which summed up the whole, dominated the whole; it was big, simple, solid, and magnificent. He could see it standing out in the history of French literature. His work was now crowned; the towers had been erected on the cathedral; the union of earth and sky had been achieved! But — there still remained many statues to be sculped, many prayers of suffering to be illuminated by windows bright with the light of genius. Once again he cried out: "To work!" He would neglect everything else and again immerse himself in his task, become engulfed in it, and no doubt die of it. For although he felt himself to be Michelangelo in strength of intellect, he had death within him and he began to reckon with anguish what respite death would allow him. Fifteen years? Ten years? It must be fifteen!

"Doctor, see that it is fifteen — or sixteen!" he would say to Dr. Nacquart, whose uneasiness he began to perceive.

The doctor would auscultate with all the anxiety of a friend. Some days he would grow pale when he listened to Balzac's heart. The heroic heart! Stimulated by coffee taken by potfuls, it would begin to beat with all the vehemence of youth, and it wasn't blood so much as flames of fire that it sent to the imagination. It illuminated the imagination, but by consuming itself. It was a heart already worn out. It is true that it was in the body of a portentous man: they thought it was extinguished; they

found a brazier; but every brazier produced ashes. Emerging after sixteen or twenty hours' work, throughout which he had been like a volcano, he would go from one end of Paris to the other after printers, dressed anyhow, in a shooting-jacket and strapped trousers thrust into heavy boots. Where now was the dandy who had once been in love with the Marquise de Castries? And with cheeks streaked with bright red and a deadly dark ring under his eyes, he was awful to look at.

"Dear friend," Nacquart would implore, "do not overdo it!"

"Doctor," Balzac would reply, "don't talk to me as though I was a manufacturer of sabots, working all his life long on the same pattern. You can tell him: 'Don't turn out so many!' because it is simply a matter of quantity. But in my royal trade, where it is only a matter of quality, moderation means mediocrity, which means nothing, and it would be a case of dying in order to avoid death! — Besides, I am already better!"

Ah! How many times the devoted doctor had heard that phrase! "Already better — by dint of never taking care of yourself, isn't that so?"

"Well," said Balzac to him one day, "David d'Angers — who is accustomed to looking at men, isn't he? — wouldn't believe yesterday that I had passed forty. And, upon my word, Doctor, I have a symptom of rejuvenation. I had white hairs; I plucked them out, in vanity; they're growing again, but black! I may have still twenty years to go!"

He did not disclose to the doctor the real reason why he was so confident: he had just learned of the death of M. Hanski! So there was indeed a special providence looking after his loves? In the six years during which he had not seen his dear Eva, who would have believed it?

III

He had just lived through some fearful years, a prey to every form of torment, alone, terribly alone, ever since the death of *La Dilecta*. Never having anything to tell Mme Hanska but a story of failure, he had slackened his letters; and, besides, he felt that she mistrusted him. He had thought to master her, to bind her to his destiny and his glory: she still remained the Polish aristocrat, married to M. Hanski. Inasmuch as she kept criticizing him and besieging him with questions, it was clear that she had ceased to retain all the trust of a woman in love, that she had ceased to admire all his mind; whereas this was what he most of all needed in love, passion of that kind for all he thought and did. He had believed himself all-powerful over that woman and he was wrong; she was much too inclined to analysis; she dwelt upon details; she lost a view of the whole; in the end she was ruining the admiration he felt for her by little acts of spite. Besides, seeing that she was not free —— Now, in the month of March 1841, came a letter with the news: she was a widow! Quickly he bestowed upon the dead husband a thought of respect and pity, but he thought of her with such emotion as he no longer believed himself capable of feeling. — Now he could marry her, and he still wanted to; therefore he would marry her! When a man is the king of thought, he must find a consort among the highest nobility. His self-conceit acted as a spur; he saw no further obstacle in the way of his happiness; and he wrote to Eva a letter of sympathy which was a cry of joy.

Then came another leap into work. All his faculties became rejuvenated at the prospect of the splendid goal, which his work had earned. Two or three subjects which were languishing once again became animated. A passion for building seized him again. He would now pro-

ceed with the most beautiful portions of the monument, which would be devoted to Eva, who for the past eight years had been his wife in the eyes of God. Oh! Neuchâtel! Geneva! What overwhelming passion! How could anyone deny the mystic beauty of that adventure? That woman of pride and strength, in religion as in love, had been able to prove to him a hundredfold the predestined union of their minds. Thanks to her and to her sensibility and to the effluence from her, he had been able to reach out to the infinite and to raise himself to the divine. His mission and his task had become clearer as a result. How many of his books had no other reason for their existence than Mme Hanska, the great lady of Wierzchownia! All that could not possibly be without result. The death of M. Hanski was in the nature of things. It had happened in the time appointed by Providence, after all the hesitations, the suspicions, the coolnesses, so that Balzac should have nothing more to fear and might be able in two words to kindle afresh a passion which was necessary to the glory of France.

He began once more to send her letters, which will always rank amongst the most beautiful ever written in this world. There was nothing epistolary in them, only burning words, abundant lyricism, the impulsiveness of an ardent life, tortured by a great ideal. He was in love, he was generous, he gave himself, he sang, without shift or wile; he related, hour by hour, his whole life, with impetuosity, with the same hurried beat as the clock made in his ears, the pendulum of which kept repeating: "Lose no time; life is short; your work is long." His pen sped along in time to the beating of his heart. As he wrote, he could see his dear Eva. He had a little water-colour of the house in Wierzchownia, a small visiting-card engraved with her dear name, and the letters spoke

to him, recalling her forehead, her eyes, her smile, and he had the piece of her violet-coloured dress, which he used as a penwiper. — He stopped writing; he began to talk; what he said had the tone of his voice. When he was happy, the words gushed out; when he was weary, they sighed. And although, when she received such letters, Eva was at the other end of Europe, she must have felt a passionate arm encircling her waist and the words caress her in a breath of love. How handsome he was when he struggled! Nothing disheartened him. He really worked for God. He toiled, he suffered, he became exhausted; but the thought of glory made him stand erect again; that was his star in the darkest night; and by glory he meant, not the praise of men, but the intoxicating commendation of his conscience and his mistress. The dear woman, sensitive and reflective, what a help she was to him, what an inspiration! If his work had such wonderful buoyancy, the reason was that he was working for her, telling stories for her, speaking to her about love. There was not a page which did not contain the flash of a memory, some reference to the ideas which they had exchanged at Geneva or at Vienna, because in the tumult of their passion they touched on everything: love, religion, the deep mystery of life, the gravest social problems, everything with which their hearts overflowed in each other's presence, each having before him the chosen of his heart. The work was for Her; the letters were to Her; She was his; and if She delayed any longer in becoming French, well then, he would become Russian and go and finish his work over there!

Now, she was hesitating and all the more since she had become free, for he was urging her and she had to reply to his questions, the questions of a scatter-brained man of genius. —

III

Again, she had at her side an aunt Rosalie, an unattractive character, of whom she would say to Balzac: "She bristles with a hundred nails!" And Aunt Rosalie opened her lips only to persuade her niece that marriage with such a man would be degrading. With diabolical skill she had the cunning to recall and to collect all the evil rumours which were current about Balzac: that he was in love with Countess Visconti, that he was in love with Mme de Valette, that he was in love with Mme Marbouty; and it was true that with all of them his relations had been frivolous, reckless, and no doubt rather free; but they were merely passing amusements, recreations between two "battlefields." He was amusing himself, and his heart was not involved. Few women are able to believe in this double rôle which men play. And Balzac denied it — the only possible tactics. He would write: "I worship you only." And it was true. Then, after writing more and more letters, he would make up a book, *Albert Savarus,* so as to show, but without appearing to do so, what misfortune can befall a soul believing too readily every evil rumour. He began to shake her resistance. Then the aunt would try other arguments. It was not right of Eva to sacrifice the future of her child to the caprices of her heart. Eva couldn't marry a man who had been badly brought up, who was without any breeding at all. Now, Balzac was just such a man. Sprung from such a humble family! — Perhaps he had genius: that was merely a freak of nature; but he had no breeding, and that was a social defect, inadmissible among the Rzewuskis, who had given kings to Poland. To crown all, he was a French writer, and that meant the successor of those eighteenth-century philosophers, a worthless crew which the French aristocracy had merely tolerated in their drawing-rooms,

and, as a reward for all their kindness, they had had their reputation ruined! It would be at once an ill-assorted marriage and an act of madness of the part of an aristocratic woman to unite herself with a man who earned his living by his pen, to a —— "Yes, indeed," she said one day in a rasping voice, "to a *foreign scribe*!"

Mme Hanska was able to make a sufficiently large allowance for the extravagances in which this mean, acidulated soul indulged her spleen, but in her heart she felt the bitterness of the aristocrat at seeing the man she loved earning his livelihood by writing books. She admired him more for contracting debts; in that respect, at any rate, it seemed to her he bore some resemblance to a great nobleman but — doomed to celibacy. The awful monetary difficulties in which Balzac was struggling filled her with terror; it was no use his going on saying: "I am a cleverer financier than Rothschild"; all she was certain of was that never, never, never, did any of the good news he sent her turn out true, but always, oh, always, some unforeseen calamity occurred. Whether he was himself to blame, as she believed, or his bad luck, as he wanted to make her believe, he was not a man whom one could marry without certain risks. She dreamed of marriage, but in sadness, and without telling him so in so many words she gave him to understand as much. What, then, was to be done? Should he answer her reasons with a fresh set of reasons? He felt that he would be unable to convince her. So once again he had to seduce her in order to reduce her. How was it to be done? By his work! Always his work! Everything decidedly brought him back to that. If he could once more rise to the heights of stirring Eva's enthusiasm, he would triumph; he would go to Poland, carry her off, and marry her.

III

Then he fell a prey to fresh devouring fires, and a new fever began, with great hallucinations, which was never destined to abate until the spark of life in him was finally quenched. It was an effort which lasted ten years, throughout which he never relaxed, at once an effort of will and unconscious, for he ordered all that was most secret in him to come forth; his mind, which he would compare to a foundered horse, would sometimes refuse for weeks at a time to obey; then suddenly it appeared and, as soon as it appeared, took hold of him. So he became Balzac soliciting, then suffering from, the humanity of which he was the abstract. And in the depth of his soul he found the seeds of every virtue and every vice. He felt himself to be gilded with a golden halo, and then he would give himself over to the demon of darkness. He was woman as well as man; and his ancestors of every sort, old and young, the riff-raff and the angels, all the countless human beings some memory of whom his blood retained, awoke at his unwearying summons to enact before him the vast drama of which they had been the actors ever since the adventure of sin. What a drama! What a crowd! What a tumult of voices! What a press of feet! The walls of his skull echoed with the roar of words; his heart had become like a way-side inn; in his exultation he groaned; he was being consumed in the flames he had himself kindled. —

In order to devote himself to this infernal labour, after leaving Jardies he had come to hide, with his papers and his candlesticks and his dressing-gown, in the village of Passy, where he aspired to have peace and be alone with his dreams. It was about three hundred yards from the Seine, on the slope of the hill, which had been cut into terraces and built upon at all levels. The rue du Roc, a real country street, lined with walls crumbling

under ivy thick with birds, at that time ran alongside an enormous park, with dense trees, and facing it was the two-storeyed building in which Balzac came to dwell: a country-house with a large gateway, opening on a secluded back yard and continued by a wall which supported a hanging garden, with a vineyard for border, exposed to all the winds that blew. The garden belonged to Balzac, as well as one window on the street and three others on the court-yard. And yet he didn't go in through the gateway, although he could go out that way. A staircase, concealed under a trap-door, led down from his quarters into the yard. The idea pleased him enormously that he could escape in that way, if some importunate visitor kept him from using his real door. The latter could not be perceived from the rue du Roc, or indeed from any other street: it was a secret, and so an enchanting situation. The house which Balzac occupied was at once the second floor in the rue du Roc and the ground-floor in the garden, and appeared to be the cellar of a big private house in the rue Basse, which, despite its name, was the highest of them all. Balzac came home by the rue Basse. He reached his apartments, as Gautier used to say, as wine is poured into bottles, from the top, and in getting back to his house he had always a sensation of mystery. In fact, to what use had this modest, concealed dwelling-house been put? Love perhaps? At all events, with Balzac love was returning to it, for he was taking up his quarters there two months after the death of M. Hanski, full of ardent hope.

Unfortunately, in this house which looked so desolate, which had all the appearance of a real retreat, he was quick to perceive that peace was to be had only at night. Five families of prolific workmen lived above his head

in flats which opened on to the rue du Roc, and there was a continuous din of screaming brats and angry mothers. Oh, for the silence of the Grande Chartreuse! How he yearned for it! How he dreamed of it! At all events, since ordinary men and their children went to sleep at night, that was the time when genius must suffer and produce. Balzac was contemplating enormous and complicated works like *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes, Les Paysans, Les Parents pauvres;* he needed the most complete silence and he achieved them all in the rue Basse in the darkness, by candlelight. They smack of it. The passions which pervade them reach an intensity of tragedy consonant with the time when they were conceived, and their characters, driven headlong by destiny, bear on their foreheads the red reflection of the candles. It is a human hell. The sorry house at Passy was in this fashion inhabited, for hundreds of nights, by a pack of victims of desire, money, and unbridled ambition, every form of misery which the grave alone can quell; but it never knew anything more frightful than the characters in *La Cousine Bette.* There Balzac put forth his most prodigious effort; never was his soul so seared; the appalling men and women who issued from him borrowed his own fire and consumed him; it was the supreme sacrifice by which he ascended to the highest point of his work.

It was killing him, but it would make him famous, for he had worked well for God and mankind. 1844 had been appalling for the torture suffered by a body which he exhausted without stint. Liver, heart, head, and lungs were all so many causes of suffering. He even came to know days of utter exhaustion, when his brain, in a fog, could no longer find means of expression. Then he became frightened! Upon Dr. Nacquart's entreaties, he

consented to take to his bed; then, after a deep, heavy sleep, he would rise up again and the doctor was no longer there; he would run to his table and stay at it for eighteen hours, compelling the body to follow the mind, like a soldier on the march despite his swollen feet and aching back. He wrote *César Birotteau* with his feet in mustard and his head in opium.

Yet in 1846, at a time when he had conceived the first broad outlines of *La Cousine Bette*, his body was giving him a respite, and in his heart there was some hope. After eight years' absence he had seen his Eva again, Eva, who was to become his wife, at Saint Petersburg, where, since her husband's death, she used to spend part of the year, and in a blue drawing-room looking out on the Neva he had found her just as beautiful, just as youthful, just as passionately intelligent. Everything Russian had roused him to a high pitch of excitement. He had spent several weeks in a state of religious ecstasy. There had been only one quarrel in three months, with regard to a cook! All the rest of the time was lyrical, spent half-way between heaven and earth. When it was over, he had to make his way back to Paris, that desert of men, whilst she was going to her home in Poland, to her desert of wheat-fields. And he had met her again only some eighteen months later at Dresden, in January 1845, where she was living with her daughter and her daughter's betrothed, Count Mniszech, whom Balzac nicknamed Gringalet (the kid), while he allowed himself to be called Bilboquet (the addle-pate). Wonderful days, when they were as happy as children! With the magnificent simplicity of genius he had the secret of growing young again without effort, and he shed the light of his sparkling gaiety upon the period of the young people's engagement. They all went

off together to Italy; they secured an audience with the Pope. Balzac left the Vatican in an ecstasy of admiration at the hierarchical strength of the Catholic Church. In religion, too, he was a legitimist — more so than ever! The Church alone had been able to conceive a society in which strength and charity helped each other; the Church alone understood entirely the meaning of life, answering its exigencies with goodwill, but insisting that men should consider its ends. How well he understood his dear Eva, his "sweet darling," when she resolved to spend the winter in Rome, where the most precious memorials of Christendom are gathered together! Alas! The *Human Comedy* was summoning him back to Paris; a big edition of the work was due to appear; he left crying like a child. But as soon as spring came in 1846, he fled once more to the Eternal City.

And it was on his return from this journey, from which he came back dazed and dazzled, like a man passing from the blinding glare of the sun or the roaring of the wind into the silent shade of a house, that, as he sat down to his table, he felt himself dominated by the dramatic subject of his *Cousine Bette*. All that he was bringing home was promises and sweet memories, but as soon as he took up his work again, without bestowing a thought on his own life, he became the stage upon which the necessary scenes were acted, the "*Scènes*" which he had not yet published. Now, as he advanced into life and drew nearer to the end which awaits every existence, his visions became more stark, because he began to see deeper into the drama. Currents from a far off ancestry passed through his mind, teaching him about the unchanging essence of human passions, the most appalling and the most elemental, those which will be most often evoked, and most terribly, at the

Last Judgment; it was therefore necessary in the world below, like the servant, as he was, of the Sovereign Judge to begin the case against them, and he set to work on it with the fearful zeal of a man who has come to the end of his part in life, who has nothing left to fear in anything he conjures up save not performing yeoman service to truth, the contemplation of which will be the eternal felicity or misery of human souls.

One evening in the middle of July 1846, towards seven o'clock, just after dinner, as he was sitting in his study arm-chair in a reverie before starting again to work, his housekeeper, Mme de Brugnol, came in. She had been in his service for some years past — a good-looking woman in the forties, intelligent, strong-willed, greedy, and devoured by curiosity. He had taken her into his service upon the recommendation of friends and she had prevailed upon him by the authority with which she acted as his door-keeper. He had left her his keys and she knew how to make use of them. That evening she came in to tell him that a packing-case had arrived from Italy.

"Another picture, I suppose!" and she sighed.

Balzac was extraordinarily quiet. On any other day he would have jumped up, run to take hold of the pincers, and prized open the case, for he had been possessed for months past of a mania for collecting things; he was making himself a gallery and professed to buy only masterpieces, always dirt-cheap; and in fact he had been one of the first, in that tasteless era, to make the discovery of the great art of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, devoting himself not only to paintings, but to furniture, chairs, and clocks, always spurred on by a passion for what was nobly conceived and delicately executed, and therein, as in everything else that he en-

gaged in and discussed, he saw clearly, spoke exactly, and was a forerunner. And his tiny house was crowded with canvases and knick-knacks, the arrival of which gave him an ecstasy of joy. That evening he did not stir; he said only: "How much are the customs dues?"

His mind was elsewhere. He had a settled but powerful expression; he was very handsome, for there is an intensity of tranquillity like deep silence. A well-defined line ran across his high, broad forehead, which was covered with thick hair, hard as bristles. He breathed slowly through his thick nostrils, square cut between his strong cheeks, which were now well furrowed. In the drooping moustache, the serious mouth, the heavy chin, were traces of the lessons which life had taught him, but in his eyes gleamed only hope and energy; and his eyes glittered and riveted the attention, like his neck, which the shirt always showed off to advantage, that wonderful neck, white as a woman's.

Mme de Brugnol said to him with a grin: "I'll bet that to-night you're in love!"

He replied gently: "Give me my coffee-pot, will you please?"

Whereupon she: "Come now — you know what the doctor said: coffee is killing you!"

Balzac's face lit up. "I am rather afraid," said he, "that it's I who have killed coffee. Give me my coffee-pot."

"Are you going to work all night?" she inquired.

"All night," he replied, "and it won't be long enough. — For that little rogue Cousine Bette will take longer than I thought. I shall have as many more pages again."

"As many more again!"

"Thirty instead of sixteen! But then, I shall get twenty thousand francs instead of ten thousand, which

has its importance for picture collecting. — Madame de Brugnol, please give me my coffee-pot."

She left the room, shrugging her shoulders. He rose and went as far as the garden window. It was stifling hot. The night, which was coming down, brought not the slightest relief: the floor and the walls sent back the heat. Balzac took a little walk outside. He looked at his house and heaved a sigh. "What madness to think that I should try to work here this summer! Above my head is a corrugated-iron roof; below me, a laundry keeping up all day long a fire fit for a railway engine. — There's where I have taken up my quarters. — How typical of my whole life! — I shall have accomplished the greatest work of my time in conditions which would make the rest of mankind weep. — But after all, that's the marvel and — the beauty of it."

He went in again. "I'll bet its fifty degrees in this room! The pictures will begin to melt. I must remove them."

He went up to one of them, which he called the "Aurora" of Guido Reni. "Ah, happy nymphs! Playing in the water!"

So saying, he took off his flannel dressing-gown, as though he wanted to plunge into the water himself. He remained there in grey trousers and a shirt, which he opened wide on his chest.

Mme de Brugnol, with lips pursed, brought in the coffee-pot. It was of white china, with violet initials, standing upon a night lamp to match, through the holes in which could be seen the little, pale flame which, all night long, was to keep the stimulant warm.

Once again he said: "You've got some cherries, I believe?"

"Four pounds."

"Not sufficient. Hand them over. — Thanks. — And now good-night, Madame de Brugnol!"

Both windows were wide open. There were some papers scattered about his narrow table. He cleared a space on which to put his candlestick, which was a handsome one: a minister's candlestick, he was fond of saying, in chased bronze, to hold five candles. He lit them all. Straightway, in their light the memory of Mme Hanska stirred again. She was at Kreutznach, but only last year at the same season, he was visiting, along with her, Montrichard and the valley of the Cher. He saw her once again on the road, smiling underneath her sunshade. What a wonderful companion she was! Always graceful, and so intelligent! It would make him crazy with happiness to have her in his room, and to work with her by his side. Once again he made the addition: "Thirty sheets . . . Ah ha! Ah ha! but that will bring me in a lot more than twenty thousand francs! So I shall have something over all the money I've got to pay. When *La Cousine Bette* is finished, I can begin to look for a small house in Paris in which to install her and love her, where she will help me, where she will be my goddess, where, where — I shall be a completely human being."

He took up his pen. A slight breeze blew in from the garden.

"Heavens!" said he, fanning himself with his big shirt collar, "how refreshing it is! — And how kind of it to come to the help of a poor devil of a writer — who, fortunately, is about to tackle an admirable subject!"

With both eyes he considered all the papers heaped together; for the pages, all spread out there, some in manuscript, the rest already in proof, were *La Cousine Bette*. As always, he had first sketched out the whole;

Balzac. Two medallions
by David d'Angers

then raised a sturdy scaffolding and proceeded to build in a hurry; during that night, he was going to begin the decoration.

There was another current of air. Balzac mopped his forehead and then exclaimed aloud: "It is the breath of the angels! I am saved! I shall work like a god. Heat and air, the ideal; for the soul perspires like the body, and I shall say everything I've got to say in a magnificent freedom."

Say everything that he had to say! Yes, it had to be terribly stark, of tragic simplicity, monstrous and pitiful. Desire leading the ball. A witches' revel. Mme Marneffe in the centre. Round her, all the men, Baron Hulot, Crevel, Wenceslas, the Brazilian, quivering with passion, even the Justice of the Peace coming for the verification, saying as he trembled: "God, what a lovely woman! What a loss to the world if she were to go mad!"

Balzac hit upon this just after swallowing a cup of coffee. It was the kindling fire that he needed. Thenceforth he could introduce at will gleams of comedy or flames of tragedy. He was master of his subject. He could see the contrasts of light and shade. On the one side, Mme Marneffe or abominable pleasures, on the other feminine characters all chastity and goodness, Adeline and Hortense, with cries piercing like arrows through the skies. Then the two scenes attached between Adeline and Crevel, the one shameful for him, the other in which she is ashamed before him. Then he began to see clearly which pages required further explanation: here, thirty lines of moralizing on the dangers which virginity at mature age involves; there, nearly a chapter of memories, vibrating like heart-beats upon the hell which the life of an artist is. So he was architect and painter as much as writer. And he was a man first

of all; he lived and he thought; his writing was merely the setting down of speech. At last he held his drama, he clasped it in his arms; in his hands he had the hands of all his characters. He could feel how clammy they were and how agitated. He took up his pen again, and off it went, nervous and hurried. — Only at times his eyes sparkled as they followed it; mainly they remained fixed for long minutes at a time, afire and motionless, like two coals; they could see the inner conflict, and the face was pale, as though it had been burned. The deep silence of the warm night hummed in his ears. In mind and body he had the rigid intensity of a seer; only the hand remained active; and all that could be heard was his breathing, the scratching of the pen, and from time to time the spluttering of a candle, when the breeze from the garden, in strong gusts, blew over the flame.

Then abruptly, as though his characters had ceased to possess him, he would sit up in his arm-chair, cross his legs, and pass his hand through his hair. Then it was he, Balzac, who began to speak. He could still see them all, but instead of allowing them to act alone, he would lean over them, help them, spend himself, love them! In a few lines he would show what grief was, and in a few lines indicate pity; so that in no place did the work remain a pitiless painting; but everywhere it became intensely human, in union with the generous rhythm of his heart. An equipoise, which should never be broken, between the creation of the mind and the flow of the heart is alone capable of producing great works of art. The author who doesn't go constantly from one to the other remains always and only an author: Balzac was a great man. During the time he spent in writing, it was his brain which understood, marshalled, led, and produced. The brain is the male element. But where would

the brain be without the female heart, out of which genius is born? The great gleams of art, as of life, are the offspring of a passionate marriage between the temperament and the reason. Without reason, nothing will be produced which is likely to last: without temperament, nothing great. *La Cousine Bette* is an immense work because it is a painting of vice and horror without one word of anger or indulgence, which would indicate the same weakness. For the very worst of his characters Balzac is charity itself. He tells their story and he is sorry for them; and every time the storm passes, he pacifies everything with a rainbow.

During the moments when his heart spent itself so, his eyes became filled with stars, a burning fire glowed in his cheeks, and his temple swelled with a serpent-like vein which was, as it were, the signature of genius.

A night of such intense labour was at the same time deceptive in its shortness and pathetically long. Deceptive, because Balzac would have liked to complete the whole work at one stroke, with the speed of lightning, so that everything should be gathered up and superb. Pathetically long, because such an expense of self could not be made without a terrible wear and tear, and when the sum came to be reckoned, a few hours no doubt devoured some years of his life. But what did that matter? That life be good is mere superfluity. The essential is that life be great by work and conscience.

When the earliest light of breaking day began to pale the staunch and faithful little flames of the candles, he began to feel weary. His back was like iron; his breathing was bad; the nerves in his head darted a myriad little pricks into his temples and under his eyes. He drew himself up. He said: "Vile body, purge yourself!"

And therewith he swallowed a hundred cherries,

throwing the stones all over the room. He felt refreshed. He blew out the candles. The world appeared to him of a different colour. The grey dawn is the most bitter hour of the whole day. He saw himself entering the room of Mme Marneffe, who lay dying. The pen started off again. —

It was broad daylight, the sun was already gilding the lilac-trees in the garden, and the flies had wakened from sleep and begun to buzz when he found for her in her death agony the staggering phrase: "Now I shall act God!"

It caused him such joy that he felt physical pain; he was suffering from pain in the belly, and, laying his hand on his stomach, he said: "Yes, indeed, and we men too bear children there!"

Then he rose up. He was completely exhausted; he could not surpass that heroic effort by which he had imparted heroism to the deepest damned. He took another handful of cherries and walked out into the garden. He looked at the sun, which was rising over Paris in a cloudless sky. He heard a gun fired on the plain of Grenelle, intended no doubt for some innocent rabbit. The convolvulus blossom was opening its petals, chaste as the hearts of children, amidst the leaves of the wind-swept vineyard which bordered the garden above the street. All was bright and smiling. A voice hailed him: it was Mme de Brugnol. He asked, as he hummed a tune: "And what is there, pray, that I can do to oblige madame?"

Then he walked into his study. The woman had disappeared. But he caught sight of a letter lying on his table. Oh, joy! It was from Mme Hanska! He pounced upon it. "Eveline! My darling!"

The small, long envelope, the precious seal, the dear

handwriting! With trembling hands he brought it up to his lips; his eyes filled with tears and he kissed it with all his heart.

3

He was in course of replying to Mme Hanska, on the afternoon of the same day, when Mme de Brugnol announced Mme Balzac.

"Let her in! Let her in, before I melt!" cried Balzac with joy. — "Ah, mother, I live in an oven! Look: I'm beginning to run on to my papers!"

"My poor child," said Mme Balzac with a sigh, everything being a source of woe to her, "will you never be happy? When shall I see you quiet and settled down, giving over raving against men and things? —"

"Very soon, my dear mother," said Balzac rising. "As soon as I shall have married Countess Hanska!"

Mme Balzac's eyes had not as yet crossed his. With her little, thin head, tightly fastened in the broad strings of her bonnet, she cast tearful glances at the ceiling, the walls, and the garden. And she went on, between a sigh and a sigh: "That's a marriage that is nothing but a wild dream!"

"A wild dream! I like that!"

"Like all your schemes, my poor child!"

"Like all my schemes? Really, is that so!" He was sitting square on his legs; he crossed his arms. "My work was a scheme too. Am I not in course of carrying it out?"

"But under what conditions!"

"The conditions are bad, I admit, very bad." (He grew red in the face.) "But they would be better if only my family was willing to help a little!"

"Your family! It suffers all the consequences of your caprices. If I have spent a pinched and wretched life ——"

"Oh, my poor mother, not all over again! —" Balzac fell back in his arm-chair and held his head between his hands. "It is, then, nothing at all," he went on, with infinite sadness, "to be the mother of a man who is trying to rise and become famous?"

Mme Balzac shrugged her shoulders. He noticed her action and continued rudely: "It is nothing at all, alas! Nobody is a prophet in his own country! — Very well, then, since I am always at feud with my relations, since I am judged only by the letter and not by the spirit, since behind my back my sister, you, my brother-in-law, and the lot of you spend your time in chattering — about what you know nothing about, I may inform you, at all events, that it is useless to say a word against that woman, who shall be mine in spite of everything, whether you wish it or no, believe it or not!"

"Oh, come now, but —" began Mme Balzac, who was becoming breathless (and she had stood up and was shaking her parasol). "Oh! but — we know you very well! We know very well that you do what you like with us!"

"That's another calumny!" shouted Balzac at the top of his voice. "I am the only person that I can do what I like with! And every time I have ever done otherwise, it was because someone implored me to do so! There's only one thing that I ask of my dear, my holy family: to leave me in peace! If my mother doesn't live in a mansion, neither does her son. I live in a house with working-class people, just over a laundry! But whereas I have an ideal, my family has none at all. I have work to do and my family has not yet realized it. That work

is called *The Human Comedy*. It is making progress, but my strength is declining; so I must hurry on. I need a fireside, a home. I shall have it, thanks to a wonderful woman — you can all laugh at her (irony, in France, is the highest form of intelligence!) And I am going off there, to Poland, which you know no more about than you know about anything else, for you believe that the world is bounded by Paris and that God created the world specially to hear you now give forth your profound judgments. —"

"Honoré, I shall not allow you to. — I'm going away," said Mme Balzac.

"As usual!" retorted her son. "Oh, mother, your heart is of flint, while I have a will of iron. Whenever we come into contact, sparks fly!"

"You'll be sorry for all you've said and done when I am dead!" Mme Balzac screamed in the yard.

Balzac waved her good-bye with his hand and went back to his study. He was choking. "Dead! — The wretched woman! — She knows very well that she will bury me."

He mopped his brow and took up his pen, to go on with his letter to his beloved. "You are aware," he wrote, "that I have never had a mother. As soon as I was born, I was sent to a policeman's house, until I was four. From four to six, they half boarded me out, and at six and a half, I was sent to Vendôme. There I stayed until I was fourteen, and in all, I have seen my mother only twice. — Oh, Eveline darling, compared with me, you are in clover with your relations! My beloved, let us keep close together. Do not ever leave me. You are to me mother, friend, and sister. You are my mistress. You shall be my wife!"

And he closed his eyes, and there passed before his

mind once more, in a succession of fascinating pictures, all the meetings he had had with her, in the great cities of Europe. Neuchâtel: how young and radiant she was there! Geneva! What a lovely dress! He felt that he should see it again when he died. Saint Petersburg: the blue drawing-room looking over the Neva. How well she talked! What profound observation in everything she had to say! And how beautiful she was! Eva — what an appropriate name! The only woman in the world with such intelligence, such grace, such feminine charm! —

Before even going back to see her and prevailing upon her to accept the happiness so long awaited and so well deserved — for undoubtedly she was unique, but he was so as well: were there two men in the world capable of writing what he had written that night? — before leaving for Poland, he thought that he must, with all urgency, find a house in Paris; the house in which he lived for the moment — was merely a shelter, a place in which to get out of the way. Eva would never have set foot in it without tears of mortification. She who lived in a palace, with fifty servants to wait upon her!

Such a notion did not frighten Balzac. He had the unbounded confidence in life which all generous souls possess. He had already been looking for a house for a long time. He was not discouraged by the fact that he had not been able to buy one. The inference he drew was quite the opposite, that Fate had one in store for him: that was the one which he had to discover: he was bound to be successful some time. In the Allée des Veuves, near the Champs Élysées — an admirable quarter, the best in the world! — he called to mind a delightful little house. He had been anxious to buy it, but it had been

snatched out of his fingers. Close to the Madeleine, hadn't he discovered a bargain? It was a speculation: in ten years' time there would be the centre of Paris. On that occasion he had been short of money. — At last, one evening in the Place Saint-Georges he came upon the most beautiful residence in Paris. The price was beyond him. To give that up, what a heart-break!

Once more he began running all over the place, and wrote to Mme Hanska: "Everywhere you are by my side. So I shall find what I'm looking for!"

He did find it. In the rue Fortunée — a charming name — about twenty yards from the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, a villa which was a relic of the opulent mansions of the financier Beaujon.

"A gem!" he told his dear Eva. "A gem — and no folly!" and he signed the contract of purchase with the happiness of a child. What had determined him was an interior decoration of carved wood, of which he said: "It is so beautiful that four thousand francs will furnish the whole; for the woodwork is worth all the furniture in the world. That alone will save me forty thousand francs." They were the words of a seer. A magnificent vision; strong words. Then he had to apply to contractors to put the house into a state of repair, and the torment of reality began. Mme de Castries, whom he still continued to see, said to him one day: "And so — it seems that you have bought ——"

"Don't mention it to me!" he exclaimed. "It's awful! A barrack! I am going to sell it again."

But a second vision appeared to quiet him. The little villa had coach-houses and well-fitted stables; and he thought: "It is a unique chance in Paris, and I shall feel all the benefit as soon as I shall be able to get horses!" Besides, even if the house had serious draw-

backs, it was for him to put them right and to make the house his own. A house is beautiful only when it is inhabited by an intelligence which knows how to change it. The important thing was that the house should be there. When would Eva set foot in it?

It was sooner than he thought, for he experienced the great, unforeseen happiness of her coming to Paris in the beginning of 1847. Heavens! it was his dearest dream! After Vienna, Saint Petersburg, and Rome, Passy was going to take its place among the sacred cities! His miserable little house, which seemed so squalid, and of which he used to say: "It looks like a country pub, the owner of which has failed, after having lived to see the death of his wife, six children, and three dozen customers," seemed to him to be radiant on the morning that Eva arrived. He spoke to his pictures: "Be brilliant, masterpieces!" and to the birds in his garden: "Sing for her, little ones!"

Then it was he who sang, as soon as she appeared, lovely as a goddess. "Ah! Let me look at you, let me admire you! How can it possibly be the same mind that speaks of God as you do, and yet invents such ravishing little things to make her dress an enchantment for the eyes and for the mind! You are wearing grey silk stockings, the colour I like best of all, and little, simple boots, almost as charming as the feet they cover. — And that slender thread of pattern of nothing at all on the hem of your skirt! And that mantle, which, from the back I adore, right up to that fond neck, seems to be concealing all that it discloses, because it must be seen, for it is divine! And your hat too, with its ribbons as fresh as flowers, do let me remove it with my own hands, that I may expose your forehead and your hair, all that I love, all that I will madly kiss, for I may be mad, but you are

my only treasure, and you will comfort me, dear heart, for the sufferings of the stake!"

Mme Hanska quietly submitted and then, with eyes wide open, looked round the narrow, mean apartment and, without making any inappropriate comparison, said with a happy laugh, behind her *lorgnette:* "What a strange life you lead in this Paris of yours! You live in rabbit-hutches!"

"Of course we do," replied Balzac, laughing as well, "there is no more room! We must perforce all huddle together. Everybody wants to take advantage of the current, which you too will experience and increase. Ah, joy of my life, passion of my heart, tell me, how is your daughter — and your son-in-law?"

"The dear little thing is very well; it made my heart ache to leave her."

"By the side of your Honoré, I'll bet that you will forget her. You are in Paris, just think, you will be dazzled! And you will at last believe, when I tell you: 'We shall have a glorious evening to our lives!' that it is not a fiction out of this great head, although it is true that a phrenologist once said about it: 'Oh! Oh! but it's a whole world!' Paris is a whole world too, my darling; and it will belong to us. Being on the spot, you will be able to understand! For you bring me just what I lack. Here, I am living in retreat: I am getting ready; but this house, of course, doesn't suit you in the least. It is charming, please note; Rousseau would have liked it, because Mme de Warens would have said: 'How I love that wind-swept vineyard!' But what suits us two is a strong, well-ordered life, an aristocratic life — that is to say, the best of its kind, in the tenor of it and the manner and the surroundings as well as regards the servants. Nothing left to chance. The further I go, the more I de-

test the Bohemian sort of life. The further I go, the more *catholic* grows my conception of life. His house should be to a man what the Church is to God: order, the utmost possible order! — And you, you shall be the lamp before the altar, which is never allowed to go out in the chapel!"

Like Mme de Berny, like Mme Carraud, like Mme Récamier, like Mme d'Abrantès, like all the other women, Mme Hanska experienced a kind of intoxication as she listened to him talk. When, by herself, she would muster arguments against him, they were ideas merely, devoid of life: they left herself unmoved. But there he was answering every one of them with that warmth of vitality which he radiated so generously, that expression of sincerity and liveliness of gesture, that serene confidence, and that voice which sang all the pleasure which his soul felt. How could she possibly refuse to believe in him? How at least could she refrain from telling him how much she loved him?

She did tell him, while she let him kiss her. Then she made some jealous observations. She opened her lips. He had devouring eyes and a divining heart.

"I went to the masked ball," he remarked, "perhaps they told you, sweetheart. I should like them to have told you! I was there with a woman! Guess who she was. — You know her. Now try. . . . Got it! Yes, certainly, I was with my sister!" And he began to laugh once more. Then, turning serious: "Do you know that Nacquart is terrified at my continence? He told me: 'With the cloistered life you lead, you must be taking a dose of wild heartsease every morning!'"

It was a thorny subject. Mme Hanska stayed deeply thoughtful; then she uttered a little nervous laugh. "Do you still keep on seeing Mme de Castries?"

Balzac gave a sigh. "Poor lady! She has grown very plain. — Don't let's speak of anything so sad. The *Human Comedy* is making gigantic strides. It is a tremendous building. As soon as it is completed, the magnificence of it will be awesome, and it will be such a success that, on the spot, we shall win the European market. I shall earn three hundred thousand francs a year. We shall save one hundred and fifty thousand: just think what we shall have in ten years' time! Honoré de Balzac, capitalist: what a furore in the little newspapers!"

One might have believed that he could find such expressions only in the first raptures of joy at Eva's arrival. But throughout her stay in Paris it was the same orgy of lyricism, which he was able to renew at every moment. His imagination gilded life: he turned the desires of his heart into dazzling truths. When he showed her the pictures hung anyhow in his humble house, it was the finest gallery in the world — granted always, of course, that the situation was not taken into account, and that the spectator was willing to admit a few masterpieces which were coming shortly to take the place of some doubtful canvases, which were soon to be got rid of.

"I want only," he kept on saying, "work of the first importance! — Do you see, like this!" And he would show Mme Hanska, as he placed his arm round her waist, a picture which they had bought together in the neighbourhood of Rome. She seemed to remember that the dealer had quickly agreed to an enormous discount.

"That picture there," said Balzac, "Italy trembled to let go."

In a word, his pictures would soon represent a second fortune — the complement of his work.

"Confess," said he, "that at a distance you didn't believe it! Oh, my darling, I have a flair for great things.

I am on the track of a Van Dyck which will turn your head. — What are you looking at? My handkerchief? — Oh, yes! Quite so! It has been hem-stitched by the holy daughters of the first convent in Paris. I will take you to that convent."

He had taken for her, near the Étoile, a room looking out on a garden, and every morning he would run to fetch her there, so light of foot that he always arrived in the belief that he had grown younger. "I'm getting thin, darling! I have determined, from to-day onwards, to cut out three fourths of the bread that I eat: I believe that I am on the road to salvation! Come along!"

Mme Hanska was an educated woman, always eager to learn. She was carried beyond herself by Paris, where momentous history rises at every step, in the guise of beautiful buildings, streets, and squares which evoke great figures and pathetic hours. Then, to visit Paris in the company of Balzac was to hear the poem of the past, of which his memory retained all the nobility, as his love endowed it with an unforgettable fascination. It was not clear, insipid water, filtered through authentic documents, but a generous wine, distilled from his sunny heart. Mme Hanska drank, tingled, and believed. He was wonderful and inexhaustible. As he showed her all that he knew, he kept finding out still more on his own account. Did he espy a court-yard? In he would go. Or an old stairway? Up he went. Step by step he would construct a whole history. He would emerge, covered over with plaster. She would say: "Oh! — You have soiled your gloves — and your frock-coat."

He would reply: "Bah! An idea has just occurred to me worth a fortune. I shall get enough out of it to buy heaps of others!"

In the present his mind guessed not only the past but

the future. A site for sale meant to him an opportunity for a personal romance. He would become the owner on the spot; and then ensued speculations, increases in value, a fresh field for the devouring activity of his mind, which never ceased to feel the necessity of forming new plans.

At length he brought his dear Countess to the little house which had belonged to Beaujon, where, he had said, the workmen were working overtime! They found two of them fast asleep and a third making a meal.

"That's what the government of Louis-Philippe has brought us to!" Balzac exclaimed, gnashing his teeth. "Let's go on! I don't want either to see them or to speak to them, for I should break into one of those leonine rages, quite out of proportion to the capacities of those creatures. Come and see immediately what really is of importance in this house, what I have not mentioned to you before, because I wanted to keep it back as a surprise for you, to see the effect of it upon your sweet face, in which I know how to read your darling thoughts! This house backs on a chapel, the Chapel of Saint-Nicholas, which depends from the Church of Saint Philippe-du-Roule. I have the key of the chapel, and the gallery belongs to us. So you will leave your room, take two steps, and be able to pray to God in your own home, before an altar, at the foot of a tabernacle, as in great country-houses! It is the only house in Paris, do you realize, that I know like that! Your devotion and habit of prayer are one of the most precious features of your darling soul. — Now you understand why I was so anxious to buy it!"

She considered for a moment, then quietly: "Alas! Stocks are going down. Northerns have now touched 175."

"What does that matter?" he exclaimed. "Everything here is woodwork. We shall need very little furniture."

She did not agree. Then he completely turned round. "Very well, then, at Tours I saw chests of drawers and Louis XVI chairs, beautiful pieces, and for next to nothing! Please, please: do not worry. We are in sight of happiness. You cannot imagine what this house will be like, this house in which you will receive our guests, and you will queen it over Paris. But I, I can see it and I am simply bursting with ideas! When you return here as Madame de Balzac, everything shall be completed, everything delightful, and all literature shall burst with jealousy!"

Mme Hanska had just left Paris when, one morning, Balzac met Lamartine in one of the dark avenues of trees which go from the Chamber to Les Invalides. Balzac was striding along with the step of a young man; he was radiant.

"You seem very well pleased with yourself!" the poet could not refrain from remarking.

"Ah!" replied Balzac, "now I know the happiness of angels in this world below! I love and am loved! — And by a woman as charming as she is distinguished, my good friend. Young, free, rich — a millionairess! The only obstacles now remaining in the way of our happiness are a few material ones — business to settle, papers to be put in order — a mere bagatelle: you see before you a man on the summit of happiness! Once I am married, I'll drop you a line. You are the glory of French poetry, one of the first, therefore, that I want to introduce to my wife. And I will receive you in a palace, my dear friend, a palace I have discovered in Paris! — I won't tell you another word more. Good-bye! Think of me!"

III

Had she, then, given him a firm promise before she left? Or was it not rather he, again, interpreting her smile? The eternal Gioconda! Summer passed by: the letters he continued to receive were from a woman — an adorable woman — but there was nothing definite in what she wrote. He determined to leave for Poland.

He went to the Russian Embassy, to have his passport viséd. He was received by an attaché, who the same evening told the Ambassador, and repeated it ten times in the course of the week: "I have seen Balzac! The servant brought me his card. I said: 'Show him in!' And there appeared a short, stout little man, with the face of a pantler, the cut of a cobbler, the girth of a barrel-maker, the style of a hosier, and the clothes of a publican!" Every time he related the incident, he added a satirical detail and burst out laughing.

Balzac made a comfortable journey, travelling eight hundred leagues in eight days. In more than one little hamper he carried with him a basket in which he kept for provisions on the journey some sea biscuits, coffee essence, a tongue, and a wickered bottle full of anisette. He drank this liqueur under the nose of the German customs officers, explaining to them in vigorous French that Germany was a terribly boring country. The same flat fields for twelve hours long, which decent people found unbearable! As for Poland, he fell in love with it at first sight, with its wooden houses and its peasants clad in sheepskins! But the house at Wierzchownia was another surprise; for fifteen years he had tried in his heart to imagine what it was like, but it was all in vain! What a queer place! It was a palace in black and white. His French mind had been incapable of conceiving anything like that. It was a palace at once Greek and Pomeranian, sumptuous, overwhelming, gloomy. He

immediately thought of a stage decoration for an *Iphigenia,* written by Schiller. — But that was where his darling Eva lived; there was the place where she had read him and loved him so passionately; thence had been dispatched her first letter, which he knew by heart as well as his *Our Father.* He grew enthusiastic and repeated a dozen times: "What magnificence!" His heart was overflowing with love: he could see anything; before anything he would go into raptures. Ah! the porcelain stoves! How wonderful! In Poland, at any rate, men knew how to keep themselves warm! And with straw too! What an idea of genius! And there were bells set into the walls! And everything was so rich, so tasteful, so luxurious, so perfect!

"Dear Eva," said Balzac after twenty-four hours, "I don't only feel as though I were very far from France, as though I had done in a week a quarter of the diameter of the earth — and that by itself is enough to make me dizzy — I am really in a different world — a world of queens who have discarded their titles. That's what you are! It isn't a demesne that you possess, but a kingdom, with every trade attached to your house: a pastry-cook as well as an upholsterer, a cobbler, and a tailor!"

"And if you are good," replied Mme Hanska, "the tailor will make you a Polish overcoat, the cloth for which will come from a factory quite close to the estate."

Balzac went into raptures: "Wonderful!"

"And it shall be lined for you with Siberian fox. And you will look like an elephant!"

"Wonderful!" said Balzac again. "You have everything, and everyone is in his place. Why it's the community life extended to a rural property, as it was to the city during the Middle Ages in France. A heavenly régime! I have always dreamed of it, for myself. Just

see how you give orders to your servants! And with what goodwill they serve you! What's the name of that magnificent fellow who brought me this morning my coffee?"

"Tomash. Tomash Goubernatchouk."

"More wonderful than ever! His name is barbarous, but his demeanour shows the highest form of civilization. He bows low when you speak to him. I love people to bow low! It seems to me now that Russia is the only country left where the art of government is still known. Our effete King of France should have accompanied me on my trip!"

"Good heavens," said Mme Hanska, "where should I have put him up?"

"What!" rejoined Balzac, thunderstruck at a suite of three drawing-rooms, "do you imagine that the poor devil has even a quarter of these marvels in the Tuileries, where he lives like a pauper?" And pointing to a portrait of Mme Hanska and of Anna as a little girl, on the wall amidst landscapes and holy pictures, "He certainly has nothing worth that!" he said. Then, turning towards another painting, representing himself in the habit of a monk, by Boulanger: "That has become a horrible daub. You would think that it had been painted with bitumen. Where did the wretched man buy his colours?"

It was the only thing that he found fault with in that princely household. He was delighted with his room. It looked out on two different sides, it had two prospects, two different poetic charms: on one side, the forest, a rough and gloomy note; on the other, the whole lay-out of the gardens, which, on beautiful evenings, made a gorgeous bed for the sinking sun. This room was in rose stucco, and had a vast fire-place. Mme Hanska had

worked with her own hands a small fire-screen in tapestry; she had depicted a hunter at the corner of the fire and, at his feet, a dog dreaming before a dead wild-duck.

Alone in that room, and resting, Balzac reflected endlessly and with delight on the magnificent "business" which he was on the point of carrying through. This time, at any rate, by force of genius, he had succeeded in attaining fortune! God has many ways of rewarding his creatures. One single woman reader in Poland was enabling him to earn all that the Belgians had caused him to lose. And over and above her immense riches, she was giving him her love, love of the most passionate and the most exalted kind, and her delicate mind, to the judgment of which he owed so much. How right he had been in telling her that she would queen it over Paris!

He told her so again. Yes, yes, she would open a literary *salon* and immediately it would take the first place, because, as a rule, *salons* of the sort are held by parrots or uneducated women of the world. A great lady, of distinguished family, allied to the most aristocratic houses, at once witty and beautiful, ah, she would be queen before a month had passed — and that was the part she was born to play.

"Darling," he went on, "in all you do, you act like a princess, and that gives me a continual sense of exaltation when I am by your side. What a splendid education you have given your daughter, that child who saved me in your mind, by fighting against her awful aunt! I am always lost in admiration when I hear her discuss anything, as she does with such distinction! Oh! you will laugh at my conceit, but it is only love: it seems to me that I should have brought her up in just the same way, and sometimes, when I look at her, I wonder if she isn't mine!"

III

When he sat at table, his mood became even more tender: "You know, my friends, away in Passy I guessed exactly what you were; you, my sweet Majesty, I would put you over there; and I could see you, Anna, as though I had made you with my own hands! — And your mother was sad without me — and your dinners dull without my sallies to enliven them!"

When they went out walking, he never ceased singing the praises of Poland. In villages, in the midst of the crops, in front of the country folk and their costumes, he would stand gaping with wonder. "What simple strength! What plenty!"

Then, as he was politically minded, the sight of a great field of growing wheat was sufficient to start him off on conclusions like the following: "England and Russia are the only two real powers. England is artificial, whereas Russia is genuine, for Russia possesses all the chief raw materials."

Did he happen to come upon a peasant hammering a piece of iron under a thatched roof? It was a Benvenuto Cellini grown in the heart of the Ukraine, a marvellous mushroom! Did he traverse a forest of oaks belonging to the Mniszechs? Immediately he would set on foot an enterprise of vast scope: the French railway companies were laying out their systems. They needed oak wood for sleepers. They should be told about that wood, and even compelled to buy it. Without a minute's delay he would write to Surville.

"You have sixty thousand feet of oak, ten yards high and ten inches wide," he would explain at dinner. "That is a size which we haven't got in France: they will be delighted with it; they will jump at the proposal. Then I tell you that our profit will be five francs on every sleeper at the very least, take it from me! — Four hun-

dred and fifty thousand francs for the taking, that's the news I have for you! And if we are just a little clever, and that's the *ABC* of trade, we can earn twelve hundred thousand. I have explained all that to Surville, a very intelligent fellow — unfortunately just a little slow in getting on the move. I shall write to Laure and she'll make up his mind for him!"

Once the two letters had been sent off, he thought no more about the matter. He must always be devising something new, and, relishing his happiness to the full, he would say to Eva: "Darling, we are so happy together, so sympathetic in mind and heart, that we ought to achieve something splendid together: we ought to write a play, it's the easiest thing in the world — or the most difficult. Ours will be difficult. There's no urgency about my going back: we have winter and spring before us, to conceive it, to meditate over it, and to settle it. Courage! Let us make the attempt."

Hardly had he uttered the words when he found from his mail that he urgently needed to return to Paris in the utmost haste. His publishers were plundering him! The future of the *Human Comedy* was in jeopardy. It meant that twenty years' struggle had gone for naught! But — he would be only a month away — one or two at most — in fine, the shortest possible time! He tore himself away from everything that he loved, caught trains and stage-coaches, and got back at the end of February 1848, when the Revolution was at its height. It did not surprise him, but it nearly broke his heart. He said in disgust: "I have long seen it coming, the horrid Republic! And it is only the beginning of the end! We shall sink into the worst kind of demagogy."

On the 24th of February he followed the populace into the Tuileries. A friend of his, Champfleury, caught

sight of him in a gap in the crowd, right in the middle of the Salle des Maréchaux. "You here!" he said to Balzac in a whisper. "You, the protagonist of the monarchical tradition!"

Balzac was very pale, and answered in the same hushed tones: "I came to fetch away a piece of velvet from the throne."

Six months later, when he returned to Wierzchownia, that was indeed the first thing that he produced from his trunk. "Here, my poor darling," said he sadly, "is a relic of what the real France once was, royalist and Catholic! It has been rather spoiled by contact with the backside of a prince who was only half a king. But how much more that backside was worth than the faces which we shall shortly see!"

Politics were an affliction to him, almost as great an affliction as his own affairs. The work of building in the rue Fortunée was making no headway. He had made up his mind to put his mother in there, because she was careful and exacting to an excessive degree: but would she be able to give orders? Lastly, literature was at a standstill; publishers were very timid and grumbling; his brethren jealous; the public in a state of anxiety, and not caring two straws about books.

"Ah! my friends," he said, "if it were not for you ——"

How depressed he was, for all his delight in coming back to that household, which henceforth he could not do without! Strength was beginning to fail him. He had no longer the courage to live alone. He was so low that at the first snap of cold he fell ill — seriously ill. And the illness? A little of everything. His lungs seemed to be gravely affected; but in his physical life as in his moral life, it was the heart which led all the rest, so it

was the heart especially which was bad. Sometimes he would have fits of coughing and choking; at others, a feeling of general debility; there were times too when he imagined that he was being poisoned!

They called in two doctors with a good reputation, a father and son, the Doctors Knothe. The former had seen so many sudden deaths and inexplicable recoveries that he didn't know what to believe. And he thought he could make Balzac better: what was there to prevent him? The son was a young man; he professed rigid doctrines; he told Madame Hanska: "Madame, it's all up with him." And yet it was in the help which the son could give that poor Balzac felt most confidence. On his advice, he drank pure juice of lemons, six or seven lemons a day, which brought on distressing fits of vomiting. So that the father compounded a powder for him. And in the end they both gave him up to the fate which awaited a man who had worn himself out and who was beyond all human succour, whereas he, as he kept on saying, had been so generous in assisting others.

He would remain in an arm-chair, all heaped up with pillows, in front of his great fire-place and, shivering with fever, he would implore Tomash to pile whole tree trunks into it, whilst whirlwinds of icy snow swept round the house. His shining eyes would turn from the window, whence he could perceive only an all white landscape, to the fire, which was glowing red: inevitably he began to think of the retreat from Russia and the burning of Moscow. Was he not a second Napoleon? And he began to think, with a shudder, that perhaps like temperaments have like destinies and that he had come, like the great captain, to his downfall in the steppes of Russia. Then the door would open. It was Eva! Immediately his evil dreams dispersed; and along

with her he would build new plans for the future, until, with a smile upon her lips and without appearing to do so, she would call up the past — which was so much more certain!

He went through the winter with ups and downs. He tried to work; he worked badly. But such care was taken of him as the angels in heaven must take; then he would be profuse in returning thanks, and write to his mother, and she, in her turn, would write a letter thanking "Your Ladyship." The news which came from France was very bad. Poor Surville was fretting and fretting. His business was in a bad way.

"As long as the monarchy isn't re-established," Balzac would say, with a sigh "— and I can't see that it is within sight ——"

"Oh! Louis-Napoleon," Mme Hanska would retort, "that's always some improvement!"

"Bah! You know what my friend Laurent-Jan, the wittiest man in France, writes to me: it is a ladder for getting us out of the sewer of the Republic! No, there's nothing pleasant as far as I can see. There's only one solution to the mischief: let us forget, and love one another! My Eva, my life, my light, my star, when shall we be married?"

"Why — when it's fine again!" she would reply.

He was so insistent that, in the end, she agreed to his asking the Czar for permission to marry her, as Russian law required. He had no doubt that it would be granted: was he Balzac for nothing? The permission was refused. He was not absolutely reduced to despair about it, because there is always a means of getting round the law: Mme Hanska might, for instance, secure her liberty by making over her fortune to her children; but it upset him so much that he felt his strength giving way. So fame

meant nothing after all, and he had worn out his life in attempting to acquire fame! Instead of giving him again strength and pith, spring, as in all bodies burned by fever, produced every kind of disorder, and his heart-disease made fearful progress in one week in June. Ah! this time it was all over: the earth was calling to him! It was a question only of days or hours: he was like a tree struck by lightning. He would say to his beloved nurse: "My head weighs more than the dome of St. Peter's." And the only thing which enabled him to retain his hold on life was the memory of their journey to Rome together. "How lovely you were and ——"

He could not continue. Fits of choking and vomiting shook him, rent him, overcame him. One evening, after a whole day spent suffering, he was told that lightning had struck a mill and burned it to the ground. He said: "I am in the same state. Nothing remains of me!"

"My dear, my dear," Mme Hanska replied, in her slow, taking accent, "you have a lovely dressing-gown of Circassian fleece: you mustn't give way to despair like that!"

Then he would smile, feel better, and say: "Yes — you remember, it was my dream ever since Geneva — ever since I had seen yours!"

And he had strength enough left to whisper words of love to her, at which she was so distressed that she questioned the doctors again. She was told by both of them this time that it was impossible to cure him, and she began to think that it would be a charity to marry him.

"Sweetheart," said Balzac one day when he felt better, "I feel that God is giving me a respite, that the end is not yet, that we shall yet be able to attain that bower in the rue Fortunée which has been waiting two years for your beauty, and where I will repay a hundredfold

all the tenderness you show me here. And so, Eva, I ask you once more, when shall we marry?"

She looked at him with infinite pity and she slowly replied: "After the harvest — after the threshing — in the blaze of autumn."

He kissed her hands so passionately! When dinner was served, he was able to come down to table. His cheeks were on fire. "I am as strong as a bull," said he. "My friends, I am giving the grim monster all the trouble in the world. Death believes himself to be the king of humanity; but I, I represent the opposition of the living!"

And he almost had an appetite. He almost liked Polish beef, which is always stringy. "I must write to Laure," he said, "and get her recipe for tomato sauce." At dessert he drank to the health of everybody. "Your tea is exquisite; your milk foods are delicious; your faces are charming; and it is wonderful to be with you, because one is far away from the French Republic."

The mind was so predominant in that powerful, well-constructed body that the will to recover brought about an improvement which lasted for some time. And Mme Hanska, who had been filled with anguish at the thought of his dying, was now filled with anxiety that she might perhaps have to fulfil her promise. She began again to contrive excuses. And the summer passed without anything's being done. He loved her; he was beside her; why shouldn't he be patient?

The end of autumn brought back the cold winds which did him such harm. His lungs felt the effect of them terribly. "Terrible winds of Asia!" he would pant in anger. "Poison to a European!"

He thought that he should die, and Mme Hanska moaned: "Poor dear, you will worry me to death!"

III

He had begun to write a story, a play, and a *Letter on Kiev*. He would say to her, with tears in his eyes: "You will finish them all, won't you, when I am dead!"

Then, just as abruptly again, his illness abated. He felt as though his heart had been "cleaned up," and that he had got a weight off his chest. There was only the fever which remained. But the fever was nothing, he was living on that! One day, in a metallic, resonant voice, he again exclaimed with earnestness: "Eva, when do we get married?"

It was early in February 1850. Despite the season of the year, the weather was mild and soft. There was intimation of a precocious, early spring. And as though he had it in himself, he had with her three magnificent weeks of passionate, overflowing youth and burning eloquence. Did this last springtime of his life remind him of his early years? Mysterious nature is often cruel. Mme Hanska felt her heart overwhelmed. It was no longer pity which surged in her breast, but love, as when they had been at Geneva. She forgot his pitted face, his swelling, his debility, all the other misfortunes which he would shake off and transform and get rid of by his eternally wonderful conversation. Ah, those February nights! For it was in the evening, after supper, when the young people had withdrawn to their rooms, that suddenly, when he was alone with her, he would begin to talk and hold her spellbound. She would sit in an easy-chair, by the corner of the fire; she would fold her hands and look and listen and love. She would notice, from time to time, that pain would convulse his face; and he would stop for an instant. "Darling, what is it?" she would anxiously ask. Nothing! Such a question brought his breathing back again. He had love, love for her and for life. Off he would go again; his voice sang

and rose, turned into a caress, and enveloped her. And the thoughts to which he gave expression were so human, so generous, and so deep, and the images so embracing and so beautiful, that it terrified her in her happiness, and she began to think: "Can he be already seeing into the infinite?" She did not know what o'clock it was, for time had ceased to matter. She made Tomash Goubernatchouk stay up. In the middle of the night he would bring in scalding coffee, and then boiling *bouillon*, and Balzac would gulp these liquids down out of cups which his fingers could scarcely bear to hold. Every night Tomash would emerge dazed, and make for his pallet, dropping with weariness. "What on earth can they find to say to each other," he would grumble, "up to four o'clock in the morning?"

He would tell her, as he had told her in his letters for the last seventeen years, all that he was, all that he wanted, all that he loved. Never did Mme Hanska pick up his letters again without reading them right through, for they were written with an irresistible force which carried her away. Every time she would think of the chariot of Elijah climbing up the sky! Never, likewise, had she been able to interrupt him when he was speaking, because he was more magnificent than fire, or the heavens when they are an abyss of light. The man before her was not simply one life; he was all the lives of his time, which he expressed, judged, and re-created! He bore not the least resemblance to other men: he was full of divine sparks. He was radiant and kindling; in a word, he gave happiness, but almost tragically, for one felt that it was his own life which he was offering to you, in this glow of lyricism.

So, after three weeks of intoxication, one morning when he had gone on talking until day-break and they

had together made up the fire seven times and she had sat listening to him hours and hours on end without uttering a word, thanking him only with her eyes, swimming with love, he had just said to her in his fine voice of conviction: "Let us go up and rest, my darling. You have transcended yourself this night! In you the soul still triumphs over the body!"

She rose and caught hold of his hands, kissed them with all her heart, and said to him, with that resolute air which she assumed when she wanted to be either very kind or very formidable: "Should you like us to be married next month? — Time to publish the bans!"

He stammered: "O Eva! — my Eva!"

Then she leaned upon his arm, and said, still speaking with the same decision: "Come into my room — come and sleep with me. —"

The following morning she told her daughter and her son-in-law what she had determined. They had for Balzac a filial affection; they were so moved that they could not find words to express their feelings. She did not understand very well why they were dumb. Being unable to convey to them that now she knew that she was worshipped without a rival, she explained: "He is a tremendous writer, my children. I can think of only Saint-Simon to compare with him. And even so, I place him higher!" Then she took her daughter aside. "You know all that he has gone through. Not to marry him would be a crime. He is doomed, alas! The transcendent genius which he has evinced these last few days, and which you must have noticed as well as I, shows that he already belongs to the supernatural world. But if his spirit sees into the beyond, his heart remains here, and it is my duty to sweeten for him his last days on this earth."

III

All this time Balzac wrote with a glowing pen to all those who were fond of him, or who might be proud on his account: to his mother, to whom he said: "I will tell you definitely what day we expect to arrive, but make arrangements with a gardener in the Champs Élysées, for the house must be furnished with flowers; it must be beautiful and fragrant!" — to his sister Laure: "Drum it well into the sceptic Surville: it's happiness for you as much as for me, I am marrying the highest nobility in Europe. I am all-powerful now, and there's an end of your worries, poor dears!" — to Mme Carraud, who had retired to Frapesle, near Issoudun: "My dear, affectionate friend, you are well aware that happy youth or flowering springtime was never my lot; but I shall have the most splendid summer and the mellowest fall. My wife knows you as well as if she had seen you with her eyes, for I have described you to her with all the feeling in my heart. She is already a true friend of yours; and she authorizes me to tell you that you will always find your room in Paris ready in our house. All you will have to do is to signal and come along. Shall I be able to make you a return for the treasures of hospitality which you have lavished upon me?"

Lastly he wrote to Dr. Nacquart: "It is a happy conclusion of a marriage derided and traduced by every envious tongue in the world! I am becoming the husband of Marie Leczinska's grand-niece, the brother-in-law to a general aide-de-camp to His Imperial Majesty the Emperor of All the Russias, Count A. Rzewuski, nephew of Countess Rosalie Rzewuska, first lady-in-waiting to Her Imperial Majesty the Empress. It is one of the most eminent prelates, appointed by the Bishop of Zytomir, who will bless our union."

He was happy in his love, happy in his self-conceit,

happy in his business sense, in his taste for the aristocracy, his inclination for grandeur, his will to be rich — happy in every conceivable way!

But — a fresh chill very nearly again put back this tremendous happiness. He thought he should die for coughing. At last, on the 15th of March, after waiting for eighteen years of passion and calculation, he was married to Eva, his darling Eva, his Eveline, the only Eva, thirty miles from Wierzchownia, in an old Carmelite convent, renowned for a miraculous picture of Our Lady, for which he had a devotion. It was a terrible and radiant day. Radiant, because he looked upon his wife with eyes of rapture: for him she was the diamond of Poland. Terrible, because of his physical wretchedness. It was cold; it was muddy. The Ukraine was soaking under a fine rain; the roads were so sodden that the lightest vehicle sank into the ooze every twenty yards or so. Balzac went in a cab and very nearly never left it again. Tomash supported him, with the assistance of "Her Ladyship," at every jolting of the vehicle. He was choking and moaning, murmuring as he leaned his head upon Eva's shoulders: "My poor sweetheart, I shall die before having given you my name!" At last he arrived and became quiet. Leaning upon the arm of Tomash, he made his way into the chapel, and the servant, whose obedience meant so much civilization to him, faithfully stood by him all through the mass.

"What a holy priest!" he remarked on the way back, speaking of the prelate who had married him.

Everything had deeply moved him. He thought even of what Mme Carraud had said: "If you were ever to go mad, I would look after you." He mentioned it to his wife in a voice full of emotion, and added: "I am mad — mad for happiness: look after me well!"

Balzac. A drawing by Gavarni

III

Unfortunately the weather was so bad, and he so ill, that, for all his desire, he was unable forthwith to leave for France. He bewailed his misfortune: "I should have so much liked to show you spring in Paris. The whole city smiles and with a smile of understanding. One of the loveliest things in all the world!"

The whole of April passed by without his being able to think of undertaking such a lengthy journey. At last, about the beginning of May, fate became a little kinder. His breathing improved. He said: "Let us leave quickly!"

For a whole week he suffered martyrdom. But he had such a tenacious hope that the air of Paris, or Touraine perhaps, or at any rate France, would cure him of all his distress, which the cold of Poland aggravated, that he suffered it all, almost without uttering a word, and as soon as he had come to the French frontier, he felt better.

Mme de Balzac was sad. He kept saying to her: "Oh, I can see very well that you don't yet believe in the future which I am preparing for you. Patience, my lovely one! You shall be rewarded for all your qualities."

At last they reached Paris, on a delightful afternoon in which the atmosphere seemed to be charged only with good news in a world of peace. When the carriage crossed the barrier, at La Villette, Balzac said with emotion: "Here we are!" And they came to the rue Fortunée towards seven o'clock, when the last ray of sunshine was lingering upon the roofs. Mme Balzac *mère* had been careful to go home, leaving the house all ready in the keeping of the servant, the faithful François.

"I like this street," said Balzac as he got down from the cab. "It is a quiet street — suitable for thinking in. And we have a jolly door, haven't we? — stout and good-natured."

III

"It is lighted inside," was Mme de Balzac's comment.

"Dear, dear, he's before his time, that good fellow! The soup must be on the table. We must ring quickly."

But they had to ring half a dozen times, a dozen times. Nobody answered. Nothing stirred. But there must be somebody, for the lamps were lit! They asked a neighbour: she knew nothing about it. They called: not a window opened. They waited: night was coming on. At last, wearied, the coachman went to find a locksmith, and the man prized open the door. Balzac was in a frightful state of nerves. Mme de Balzac never uttered a word.

He rushed into the lighted rooms. She followed him. They found François on a chair, very white, gazing at them with a haggard appearance and incapable of coherent speech. He had gone mad.

Mme de Balzac then went down again to give orders to the coachman, to bring up the trunks. And all the while Balzac leaned against the wall, on the stair-head of the first floor, with both hands against his heart, and murmured, as though near to fainting: "Awful omen! — I shall never leave this house again alive!"

4

It was the 20th of May; Balzac died on the 18th of August. What are three months of life without hope? He saw an abyss yawning before his feet. And not only was he experiencing the anguish of dying at a comparatively early age, with such a multitude of desires and of plans unfulfilled, and so much love still to bestow, but he would weep, as soon as he was alone, at having destroyed Mme Hanska's life in Poland, to give her in exchange widowhood in an empty house in Paris.

Was she well pleased with the house at least? He asked her a hundred times, and never got more than a colourless answer, such as one makes to sick children.

As soon as he felt less breathless, he would say: "Give me your arm, darling; let's go and look at the picture-gallery." Or else they would go down to the drawing-room, to the dining-room, and he would question her: "I want to know if every single thing pleases you."

Did she admire that Chinese porcelain? Were the carpets to her taste? Then up they would go again to her own room, where she had a Pompadour bed, and a crystal chandelier, and, as he looked at her sadly, he would stammer out, but without conviction: "You are in your own background here. You were born to live amongst the products of the French mind!"

A silence followed, and she would say, for example: "Don't forget that it's time for you to take your dose."

All he wanted to notice in that manner of answering was affection. He was thinking that in the last two years she had paid more than sixty thousand francs for building and decorations of every kind, and, overwhelmed with gratitude, he would repeat to her what he said every day: "You have been my life! — You know that for the last fifteen years all my books have been written for you and by your side. — You have never been away from my writing-table. — Your picture was ever before me! And if there is so much passion in my work, the reason is that never could I turn over a page without looking at you and saying: 'Eva, I do love you!' So my novels belong to you. I do not say it lightly. They are in my ebony bookcase, all bound for you. I have made some last corrections with a pen. — You will take these into account, won't you, darling, if ever they come to make a second edition. I should like to have read them

over once again with you, so that you might correct them again: God does not permit it. But I have confidence in your intelligence, and, when I am gone, you can make any corrections you may consider necessary: I'll love you for it in advance! — You are the only person in the world who has understood me in my work!"

As she listened to him speak in that strain, in his resonant voice, intended for faith and love and ardent vows, Mme de Balzac, ex-Countess Hanska, née Rzewuska, would forget all the bitterness of her situation and feel such joy of pride as made up for the sacrifice.

Dr. Nacquart had come to pay him a visit as soon as he had returned and, before his stertorous breathing, his broken utterance, and his eyes, over which a film was forming, felt distressed at the condition which he diagnosed and his own powerlessness. Balzac implored him to come back often. He came back, in friendship.

"Ah, doctor," he would say on each occasion, "I was waiting for you with impatience. I suffer more than the tortures of the damned!"

One day it would be the heart, another the kidneys, and another the stomach.

"Madame," Nacquart would say to Mme de Balzac, as he left broken-hearted, "he has done the work of ten men! Fifteen years ago, in the rue Cassini, I thought him already a dead man, and even then there was nothing that I could do. But — would you like an opinion from my colleagues?"

He called in three doctors in consultation: Fouquier, Roux, and Louis. None of them had been greatly moved by the *Human Comedy;* none of them had perceived the genius which informed it. They approached Balzac as they would any other dying man, and prescribed cupping, leaches, and laxatives, adding this touch of the

commonplace to what they conceived to be a mere everyday occurrence.

When they had gone, he had still more serious trouble with his eyes, and on two evenings he had fits of delirium, from which he emerged panic-stricken, feeling himself all over.

His old friend Delphine de Girardin came to visit him. He said to her: "Dear friend, leave your hands in mine, so that I may still feel by touch how beautiful you are — for I cannot see you any longer. Poor dear, I am dying from overwork! You see in me a very modern, very democratic, tragedy. Such a thing was not to be seen in the time of Louis XIV!"

At the end of June Mme de Balzac wrote for him to Théophile Gautier, and, in a hand which trembled terribly, he succeeded in tracing the following postscript: "I cannot read or write any more."

He had one week of lucidity in July. It was in the course of that week that he said to his mother, one day when she brought him flowers and fruit: "I love and admire you, mother! You have twopence to live upon — and alas! it's all my fault — and yet you can spoil me in this fashion. — So the time always comes when mothers show themselves sublime, doesn't it?"

Mme Balzac began to cry. "You were very unjust to me for a long time, Honoré."

"That was because you were hard on me, mother."

"Hard — oh, my child! —"

"Don't let's speak about it," he said. "You love my wife; so you deserve all my affection; and I'll find a means of having you spend your old age without worry."

It was in that same week that Victor Hugo came to see him. He made fun of his bloatedness to Hugo, and then: "Don't let's speak any more about me. You are

always wonderfully busy. Tell me how you've spent your time, all you have done and seen in the last three years."

Hugo didn't need to be asked twice. He was fond of talking and of an audience, and he used to speak as though from the top of a mountain, with pomposity, because he believed that he was a man with a mission, and as he talked, he kept saying to himself: "I am teaching; I am lighting the way!" So he narrated several incidents of the Revolution of 1848, of the flight of Louis-Philippe, who had gone off on foot. —

"Poor devil!" said Balzac.

At the Place Louis XV he had come across a cab. Mmes de Nemours and de Joinville were waiting inside. He made them get out, exclaiming: "Get out, all of you, all of you!" He took their place, and the vehicle went off at a gallop. Trianon, Dreux, Évreux. There he borrowed a farmer's gig, name of Renard. At length he reached Honfleur, Trouville, England. It was a miracle how he had managed to reach there.

"Poor devil!" said Balzac again, "poor, poor devil!"

Hugo told the story of the 24th as well: how Lamartine and Ledru-Rollin had hesitated to proclaim the Republic and had drafted the proclamation three times in rough copy. Balzac clapped his hands for joy. — At last, on the 25th, at the Hôtel de Ville, Hugo had met David d'Angers, beaming, because he had just been appointed mayor of the eleventh *arrondissement*. "The excellent David had been a republican for a long while back," said Hugo with gravity.

"So much the worse for him!" said Balzac joyfully. "He's far too serious — the Republic suits him. The Republic is always a sad business!"

Hugo never flinched. He seemed to be absorbed in thought.

Balzac went on: "When my wife comes down, she will show you, in the big drawing-room, a bust of me by David. It's a very fine bust but — it isn't me! It's David! All his seriousness! It's got none of my animation. I have loved life so much, my dear friend, I have always been so much alive."

"And you are still," retorted Hugo, with simulated spirit.

"Yes," said Balzac, sitting up in his arm-chair: "I'm improving; perhaps I shall be able to recover. A soothsayer, the famous Balthazar, predicted to me that I should have this horrible illness at the age of fifty. I shall get over it, he told me, but then I shall have to kill myself: I shall not die again! If that turns out true, if I get my strength back again, I will use all the strength I've got — forgive me! — in fighting against democracy! I cannot understand how you were able, light-heartedly, to resign your title of peer of France, which is the finest, after that of the king."

"There's something finer than kings," said Hugo, with deep solemnity: "there's the nation. I long debated the matter in my conscience. I was a peer, elected by the king; I had rather be a deputy, elected by the people."

After this declaration, he rose.

"My dear Hugo," said Balzac, "I admire democracy when it speaks through your lips, but when it acts by the hands of the people, it fills me with terror and repulsion. The people have no conception of what nobility means. As for me, I can die to-morrow: I shall have realized my dream, which was all of nobility." (He glanced at his wife.) "I am now, by marriage, a grand-nephew of Queen Marie Leczinska. I can't tell you enough how proud I am of that."

As Balzac said these words, Hugo's glance strayed

meditatively from husband to wife, then he bowed and took his leave. On the staircase Balzac said to his wife: "Show him the pictures; he will like them tremendously." Then, as he began to choke again, he went back to his room.

Mme de Balzac accompanied the poet through the picture-gallery, and quickly showed him a canvas by Guido and one by Greuze. Hugo looked at them, but absent-mindedly. He said: "Have you any hope of saving him?"

"I cannot tell," she said with a sigh. — "To-day he is doing better. — You have seen him: he has still flashes of genius. But he's a great baby. — You must excuse him for saying some of the things he said."

"Which, madame? He has been most charming," said Hugo with unctuous complaisance.

"He is infatuated with nobility," said Mme de Balzac curtly.

Hugo shook his head and eyed the great Slav lady, concerning whom so many newspapers had published all sorts of accounts; he found her to possess an air of quiet authority, two mysterious eyes, which did not harmonize their glance, a small mouth tightly pursed, an admirable forehead. He graciously kissed her hand and went away.

She went back to Balzac's room.

"Ah, ah!" said Balzac cheerfully, "he must always talk a little of his political twaddle! But I think I gave him his answer right enough: what do you think? If Lamartine had heard me, he would have been pleased, Lamartine is a much greater man. For Lamartine has really got a soul, whilst Hugo has got only the sensibility of an ecstatic porter. And although he is a democrat, Lamartine admires the nobility."

Mme de Balzac interrupted him. "My poor dear, don't begin again with me, please; you give me pain! You will never understand that real nobles never mention their nobility! And you can talk about nothing else! Even supposing that Marie Leczinska was our great-aunt — and it is a fiction of yours, I have told you again and again ——"

"How?" exclaimed Balzac, "I have proved it to you, documents in hand!"

"Even so," said Mme de Balzac wearily, "one leaves other people to find it out, one doesn't tell them so."

"Oh dear, oh dear," moaned Balzac, seized by another fit of choking, "so it isn't allowed — it isn't allowed in society — without — I can't speak any more, I am going to die! — without appearing to be an inferior — it isn't then allowed to be genuine, sincere — simple — fan me, please, I'm finished! — It is no longer permissible, when one is happy — to — to say so quite simply! — One must always therefore seem — never be. — Ah, sweetheart, I am choking."

Thenceforward he suffered unceasingly. His poor body continued to torture him, and the useless drugging to which it was subjected was simply an additional infliction. His hands and feet began to swell; his kidneys became paralysed; and then he felt as though his bowels were rent. Finally, in attempting to cross his room, he grazed his leg against the copper handle of a chest of drawers. A sore formed, which did not get better. It became burning and unbearable; it seemed as though there were fire within, and the fever, by contagion, spread all over the rest of the body, which none the less seemed to be all swollen with water, which tappings were powerless to relieve.

On the morning of the 18th of August, when Mme de

III

Balzac came into his room and asked him and his nurse, who sat by his bed-side all through the night, if he had had any sleep, he looked lost, as though he meant to say: "All that no longer matters now!" and, gathering his strength, he said in a panting but emphatic voice: "I insist — absolutely — that I be buried in Père Lachaise."

Mme de Balzac felt her blood run cold, and was about to reply. He fondled her hand and tried to smile. "I think like Napoleon — that when one has worshipped fame — only in Paris can one soundly sleep one's last sleep."

After that he lowered his eyelids, and only by vague signs answered the questions which she put to him: "Do you want to drink? . . . Have you any pain? . . . One word, my darling, my own love, only one word to console me!"

Only when the doctor came in did he pick up again. Suddenly, with eyes which looked as though they had seen the grave, he looked at him and said: "My friend — do you think — that I can still live — a few weeks more?"

"Let me feel your pulse," said Nacquart gently.

"I implore you, be kind, and answer me! Have I still three weeks left?"

"Your pulse is stronger ——"

"Four weeks?"

"For heaven's sake, don't fret yourself!"

"I see — a fortnight?"

"Come, come."

"A week?"

Nacquart refused to reply. Then Balzac sat up, and exclaimed: "A week with fever! There should be time to write a book!"

He fell back on the pillows, and the agony began, for he never uttered a single word more to any living soul.

He was entering the ultimate period when man judges his life before leaving it. He saw it all before him. Thirty years of struggle to succeed; four or five years' complete possession of all his powers: then intimation of death; and the rest of the time absorbed in a murderous battle between the greatness of the mind and the wretchedness of the body.

Then a solemn dialogue ensued between the Balzac who had understood and was resigned, and the other, who, for love, had given so much to life. He was going away; so be it; for all his titanic effort the work remained uncompleted, like a cathedral; and as one began to despair, the other would reply: "What does it matter?" One said: "Yet I have spent all my strength, I lived hundreds of nights in a furnace. I transcended what appeared to be humanly possible!" And the other would reply: "But what is all that worth, in comparison with the regal serenity of the sun, which every day spreads its light over half land and sea. Man is a pygmy!" One would exclaim: "After so much effort, how have I succeeded in achieving so little?" The other would reply: "Everything on this earth is little." "My work," the other would retort with a sort of fury, "would not have been little if only I had been able to write *Scènes de la vie militaire,* for that was all European history, dominated by the little man in the three-cornered hat! But it is a book which I have not written and my work will stay crippled." "Even after *Scènes de la vie militaire,*" the other began again with gentle sadness, "it would have stayed crippled in the eyes of all those who are incapable of admiring fine things; and their name is legion!" — "So," one would lament, "no great desire

can be satisfied in this world?" And the other would reply: "None." — "So," one went on, "the greatest artist ——" "Is the greatest artist," the other would break in, "any better than the humblest shepherd and the most unlettered?" — And one would exclaim: "What! Michelangelo, Shakspere, Beethoven ——" "Have all struggled in vain," the other would end the sentence, "against the wall which divides human beings from ultimate truth. It is something to have knocked against it, but the painful reverberation which the stones give under the bruised fists must not be taken for the indication of certain knowledge." — "So," moaned one, "my work will go for nothing!" "It is a light in the darkness," the other would reply, "but it will not dispell the darkness." — "Help, help, my children!" one cried out. "Help me, all you I have created, with my blood, my flesh, and my life!" And he began to call them by their names, giving himself the last pleasure of saying once more: "Goriot! Grandet! Birotteau! Gaudissart! Hulot! Crevel! Gobseck! —" And suddenly he said: "Bianchon!"

Then he lingered on that name of the most distinguished of the doctors in his works. And the nurse and Mme de Balzac, as they covered him again with the blankets, heard him panting: "Bianchon! — Summon Bianchon! He, at any rate, will save me! —"

But the other inner voice replied: "Save you from what?"

The Balzac who was tender, and sensitive and full of gaiety, and in love with life, answered no more. His hair was all disordered, his eyes were closed, and his mouth was open; the death rattle began, but whilst the poor body was thus yielding itself, the enlightened soul began to think of all the downfalls which are the only

lasting picture of the centuries, and of that prone position which every generation, without exception, has always taken, for ever. —

The collapse of empires: the Pharaohs lying mummified, spending centuries and centuries in the darkness, after a few swift years in the light; Alexander dying at the age of thirty; Demosthenes taking poison; Socrates drinking the hemlock; Cæsar stabbed; Molière spitting blood. Graveyards, graveyards everywhere! And everything, everything that was noble, the noblest of its kind, compelled to renounce, to give up, to yield the last breath. Besides — his own creatures died, and by his hand, for he had made Goriot die and Mme de Mortsauf. He could see her again in the cemetery at Saché, sleeping under a fragile bunch of wild roses. And abruptly he found himself at Saint-Gatien, in the white cathedral at Tours, where as a little boy he had knelt to say his prayers between his mother and his sister. He was sitting close by a pillar. He was dreaming modestly. The light which came through the stained-glass windows made a faerie spectacle. It made a rainbow in the nave and coloured the flags. And it seemed to him that he thanked God for it in a little, simple prayer. The Abbé Birotteau was meditating in a stall, with his head buried deep in his hands. He heard footsteps and turned round; a funeral procession was entering the church. And he recognized the family of Mme de Berny, following behind a coffin! — It was her own; she had died at La Grenadière!

She too! — Then he resigned himself; of his own accord, he stretched out in his bed for everlasting rest; his eyes turned in towards his soul; his old mother, who was leaning over the bed, saw the light in them suddenly go out. She uttered a cry. — In his turn, he was dead.

III

It was half past eleven at night. A clock, in the night, told the time with its humble bell. His agony had lasted twelve hours. Mme de Balzac, worn out with grief and weariness, had retired to her room: he had not seen her go. A priest had come and administered to him extreme unction, in the name of that Church the sublime inspirations of which had always uplifted him: he had not known it. Finally, Victor Hugo had brought him the farewell of Poetry; and he had not felt Hugo's hand clasp his. Then his mother, who had listened to every rattle in his throat, and answered each with a heartbeat, as she murmured amidst her tears: "Oh! — oh! — my child!" — his old mother, terrified, had stayed alone with a servant. His head lay back upon the pillow. His face was a tragic violet. From the side, Hugo had said that he looked like the Emperor.

Honoré de Balzac was given the ordinary burial which society accords to all its dead, without exception.

The hearse which bore that distinguished body went down the Faubourg Saint-Honoré as far as Saint-Philippe-du-Roule on Wednesday, the 21st of August, about eleven o'clock in the morning. Housewives were marketing. They stopped and looked, with their honest, respectful eyes, and bowed their heads: Balzac would have loved them. But among those who followed his coffin, many faces would have hurt him, and without even hearing the words used, he would have guessed what his detractors were saying — some: "His work is a Dupuytren museum!" or: "You'll see what remains of it in ten years' time!" or: "How it smacks of coffee!" or, like Saint-Beuve, in a mellifluous voice: "At any rate — there was something in him after all!" Balzac was dead; he could not drive them away; his body had

to endure them. And besides, all that they might say was as nothing, for Surville walked along bareheaded behind the hearse, remembering the reading of *Cromwell* at Villeparisis, and thinking: "How I liked him, on that first day!" — for Gozlan was explaining to a deaf Academician: "He put such passion into literature as it never knew before! None will ever be again so deeply impressed in our hearts as he!" — for to the Minister of the Interior, Baroche, who inquired in an acid tone: "He had some talent, hadn't he?" Victor Hugo replied, in a voice like thunder: "Say rather *genius*, Your Excellency!" — for Barbey d'Aurevilly, looking ghastly with mingled sorrow and admiration, refused to speak to anyone and kept his thoughts to himself. "The Bonaparte of letters, who never knew a dethronement and never a Waterloo!"

Was the organist at Saint-Philippe-du-Roule poet enough to make heaven understand what earth was losing? — The cortège slowly made its way down the boulevards to Père Lachaise. It was a dull day, and no light showed. A drizzle of rain began to fall.

They were late in arriving at the eastern graveyard. An enormous crowd was awaiting the procession. The two square yards of earth selected for Balzac, and asked for by his widow two days before, were situated high up on the hill, which the horses found it difficult to climb. They found it still more difficult to stop. Hugo, who was holding one of the pall ropes, narrowly escaped being crushed between a wheel and a headstone. There was a movement backwards and forwards and some shouting.

Then they let the coffin down into the grave, and for a minute all the crowd was absolutely still.

There were four men there, dressed like labourers, who took hold of the coffin by the ropes and let it down.

III

Barbey d'Aurevilly shuddered and closed his eyes. At that moment instead of a body being lowered he saw a spirit rising, and once more, in his pride, on seeing that misery, he believed in fame.

Then a priest blessed the grave, and Victor Hugo spoke. So that all might hear, he kept turning round as he spoke, and each one caught only fragments of what he was saying, but the speech, which was beautiful, was only the more magnificent in the result; for they heard phrases like: "The whole of our contemporary civilization" — "Comedy which he might well have called history" — "Through Beaumarchais he makes his way back to Rabelais." — The rest was lost because of the wind, which caused the tall poplars in the graveyard to rustle, or the birds chirping, or again the dull thud of the clods with which the grave was being filled; but those who were most affected — and how many unknown people were deeply moved! — had time to feel and to reflect upon the deep truth contained in such sonorous phrases.

At last the poet turned in the direction of Paris and, as though he were addressing the great city, in a voice which made prose as rhythmical as verse, exclaimed: "Is it not true, all you that are listening to me, that such deaths are a proof of immortality? . . ."

The rustle of trees prevented the bystanders from hearing what followed, but there was quiet for the last words: ". . . And they say that it is impossible for those who have been geniuses during their lives not to be souls after their deaths!"

Thereupon the crowd dispersed. It was the end of a great human adventure.

Returning in a mourning-coach, accompanied by his wife and his mother-in-law, Surville observed: "One of Hugo's remarks was unfortunate."

Balzac on his Deathbed.
From a pastel by Eugène
Giraud

III

"I couldn't hear anything," moaned Mme Balzac amidst her tears.

"Hugo said: 'Without his knowing it, and whether he wills it or no, the author of those tremendous works belongs to the strong race of revolutionary writers.'"

"If he said that, it's a calumny!" said Mme Balzac quickly.

"At all events it's a mistake and — maybe a piece of stupidity," went on Surville gently.

It had been a gloomy day. Towards twilight the sky cleared up; the sun's light gilded the tree-tops; the song of birds was heard; and Père Lachaise looked, once more, like a garden of the dead. France had just entrusted to its keeping the mortal remains of one of its glories. Thirty years before, with his young man's step, Balzac would roam about the graves of Molière and La Fontaine: he was looking for strength and exaltation. One name only, one illustrious name, was a reverie to distraction and without end! But his turn was quickly coming to serve as an example. His heart had burst with passion, and was going back to its predestined repose, in a soil inhabited at once by the lowliest and the most exalted. The great cemetery was becoming enriched for passers-by with one more cause for reverie.

On that evening of the 21st of August 1850 God knows how many women kept vigil and read once more with rapture and despair the beginning of *La Femme de trente ans* or the end of *Le Lys dans la vallée*. But at Frapesle, near Issoudun, was a faithful friend, Mme Carraud, who, without re-reading anything, lived over again, with a burning and broken heart, a sweet romance which she had had with Honoré de Balzac, on the margin of the *Human Comedy*. Great Balzac! Dear Honoré! Heroic heart that had ceased to beat! Incomparable friend,

alone now in the cold earth! — All the women who, in that evening of mourning, thought intensely of the great man yet yielded to weariness more overwhelming than grief, and at one moment or another all went to sleep, just as his sister did, and his wife, and his mother. — But Mme Carraud alone in the world kept watch, at the same time as the glorious, quiet stars that glittered above Père Lachaise. She did not go to bed. She went up to the room in which Balzac had lived, in a wing of the house, above a store-room which he had been fond of, because it was used for keeping grain and flour in — both noble things. It was there that he had conceived *La Rabouilleuse*. She brought a candle, placed it upon the table which had been his, and left the window open upon the garden, to feel the breath of that summer night, a breath coming from afar — from Paris perhaps, who could tell? — Sitting before her candle, the flame of which flickered as she herself trembled, with a far-away look in her eyes and with folded hands, she began piously to tell over the beads of her memories of that glorious man with the inexhaustible heart, and so she kept him company in her earnest thought, all through his first night in the cemetery.

Touraine. Summer, 1925

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